

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, by Frank Tousey.

No. 49.

NEW YORK, MAY 10, 1899.

Price 5 Cents.



The White Boy Chief's complexion was a pure olive, with a ruddy tinge on the cheeks denoting the perfection of health. His eyes were dark hazel, and at times almost black.

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a dotted line,

WHITE PAPER

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THE WHITE BOY CHIEF;

OR,

The Terror of the North Platte.

BY AN OLD SCOUT.

CHAPTER I.

THE SERPENT WORSHIPERS.

THE round disc of the harvest moon was just rising clear and red over the verge of a huge range of rocks amidst the Black Hills in Dakota. It arose higher and higher until the full orb appeared shedding a ruddy light upon a strange scene that was transpiring upon a plateau at the base of the mountains.

Around the plateau were arranged in a semicircle a number of Indian wigwams formed of buffalo robes, which were decorated and painted with various mystic symbols of legendary Indian lore, alone comprehended by the chiefs and braves who inhabited them.

One of these that stood in the center of the circle was the most pretentious of the group, and was embellished with the most curious and enigmatical tracings of birds, beasts, fish, serpents and reptiles of the most hideous description.

Before it a fire of fresh twigs and wood had been lighted that was spouting forth shoots of flame and smoke of the most nauseating odor, around which were gathered a number of old men and young braves, who stood regarding it with the utmost stolidity.

For a brief interval not one of the group moved or stirred; they might have been bronze statues for all the life they presented as they stood silently watching the flames ignite until they burst into full blaze and shot warmly up, vividly illuminating the huts and somber hills with a crimson glare.

But then a change ensued; each member of the group bowed his head, and unclasping his arms began beating his bosom with a slow motion as he commenced a low monotonous chant.

Gradually the strain changed and grew louder and more lively in measure, and as it increased in tone each in turn began moving round, encircling the fire in a dance of rough, but not ungraceful motion.

As the party closed together a strange shape crawled through the curtain of the center tent.

The head resembled a buffalo skull with curved horns and flaming crimson eyes, spurts of fire and smoke poured from the nostrils and mouth, while livid snakes crawled in and out of the temples and crevices of the gleaming skull.

The body from the neck to the waist was covered with the skin of a red wolf shining with a blue sulphurous glare which cast a purple tinge upon a long row of eagle and wild turkey plumes that bristled up the back like quills upon an enraged porcupine.

The arms, which were long and sinewy, were covered with bands of spotted snake skin fitting tightly to the flesh, the hands and fingers resembled the talons of a hawk, and as they worked convulsively

around the head and body the luminous light shone upon them with a ghastly and startling effect.

The loins and hips were covered with black bearskin, and the legs and feet encased in close fitting leggings of various kinds of bird plumes. Around this singular and appalling apparition hung strings of beads and wampum, buffalo and bears' teeth, claws of birds and beasts, and rattlesnake rattles that clattered viciously together with a clanking, hissing sound as the hideous object crept, crawled, writhed, and wriggled slowly toward the fire amid the circle of worshipping Indian warriors.

It was the feast of serpents, and they were paying homage to the full moon.

As the strange shape approached, every Indian ceased his movements and stood imperturbably still with arms folded across his breast.

Every eye was fastened on the earth, every tongue hushed.

For a few moments deep silence prevailed, and then the shape took up the chant.

At first he sang in extremely low tones, but gradually his voice grew louder until finally he burst out in full volume, and shouted and gesticulated in the most frantic manner. He cast his hands wildly above his head, describing circles in the air, he beat his breast savagely, and the flames burst swiftly from his mouth and nostrils.

Then, rising from the stooping position hitherto assumed, he stood fully erect, towering to a gigantic height, and leaped frantically upward, swaying his working arms wildly above his head.

Reaching the earth again he seemed racked with excruciating internal spasms as he danced, gibbered and capered like a madman.

He roared, shouted and howled in the most startling manner. Now he was down upon his knees grovelling in the earth, where he writhed sinuously to and fro like a serpent.

Again he sprang up and leaped from side to side, barking like a fox, baying like a wolf, or shrieking or snarling like an owl or a dog.

With each successive change in the mystic rites, he tore some article from his person and tossed it on the fire.

First he ripped out several feathers from the back of his dress; as they reached the flames they snapped, spattered and curled together like living snakes, casting forth a sickening and offensive odor.

Then he threw in a bunch of herbs.

The fire sparkled brilliantly, shooting up a shaft of flame that shed a ghastly blue light upon the members of the group.

He next cast in the skull of a serpent.

A low, hissing sound followed as the object struck the blaze, and as it ceased two of the Indians approached the fire.

Perching themselves upon their haunches, they in turn produced a species of reed pipe and a drum, formed from a hollow log, covered with thin snake skins.

Upon these they began playing a low, monotonous tune, considerably resembling that used by the serpent charmers in India.

While thus engaged the medicine man, for such was the position held by the presiding mummer, continued his antics, which momentarily grew more frantic.

He danced and leaped, shouted and sang, until finally, with a wild yell of almost superhuman agony, he fell in a limp mass beside the fire, panting for breath and completely exhausted. Then a stranger and more startling scene ensued.

As the sounds of the maddened priest ceased, a dead silence followed, with the exception of the plaintive notes of the rustic pipe and the tum-tum-tum of the drum.

Every Indian in the group was bending eagerly forward, with outstretched neck and wide, distended eyes.

Presently another low hiss came from a slight distance, and at the sound the medicine man partially arose from his recumbent position, and listened intently.

The hiss was followed by a low, sibilant rattle, which was repeated again and again, until hundreds of similar warning responses came from every direction.

"It is the voice of the Great Serpent and his mates," whispered the priest in the Indian tongue, rising to his knees. "Bow and adore his bidding."

At the command every Indian fell reverentially upon bended knee with bowed head, patiently waiting the coming of their god!

CHAPTER II.

THE WATER OF OBLIVION.

As the Indian worshipers fell upon their knees with bated breath and abject mien, a serpent's head darted from a hole in the adjoining rocks, and then the wriggling form appeared and crawled slowly toward the fire.

Another and another followed in rapid succession, until the whole line of rocks seemed swarming with writhing serpents, which hissed and coiled among each other in an entangled mass, snapping and biting with their sharp fangs and gleaming teeth, displaying a hideous and appalling spectacle amidst the lurid light of the fire, which now glowed brightly up from fresh fuel and herbs which had been thrown upon it by the Indian medicine man.

Gradually the writhing mass separated, and then each serpent came crawling and wriggling toward the fire.

There were rattlesnakes and vipers, black adders and copperheads, hoopsnakes and moccasins, large and small, some of them perfectly harmless, but by far the larger part were serpents of the most venomous and malignant species, the bite of which signified death.

As the noisome reptiles drew nearer and crept among the kneeling worshipers, every Indian quickly stretched forth a hand and grasped a writhing serpent.

The imprisoned victim recognized its danger too late, but struggled desperately to release itself. It writhed and wriggled, endeavoring to bite or sting the hand that held it, but the attempt seemed fruitless, for the captor held stoutly to his prey as he whispered and sang gently to it until it ceased its efforts and remained quiescent, as if mastered by a spell of enchantment. Some there were, however, who were not so fortunate.

Now and then a smothered oath or guttural grunt attested that some one had been bitten. As if to show the speedy effect of the deadly venom, the muscles of the hand or arm of the injured party began to turn a livid blue and swell perceptibly. In another moment his eyes began to glaze and turn inward, as his head dropped upon his breast and he seemed about to sink to the earth in excruciating spasms. But the medicine man, who hitherto appeared to be acting under influence of some demoniac spell or intoxicating drug, now seemed perfectly himself, and keenly alive to everything that was transpiring around him.

He was watching every movement of his followers and the swarm-

ing serpents with the deepest interest, and his black, bead-like eyes seemed fairly ablaze with all the magnetic influence of a basilisk.

As he heard the warning cry that attested that one of the party was bitten, he hastened instantly to his side and applied a remedy to the wound. He then gave him something to drink from an earthen vessel suspended at his waist. If the man was too far gone to swallow, he stretched his head back upon his knee, and forcing open his mouth, poured the liquid down his throat. Then placing his own lips to the wound, he sucked out the poison as well as possible, spitting it upon the ground, and applying a decoction of moistened leaves upon it.

The medicine man's measures were almost marvelous in effect.

It seemed scarcely an instant after he had applied the apparently simple remedies before the patient, who had appeared in a dying condition, was able to rise to his feet and dart off in search of another serpent; and so wonderful was the strength and effect of the drugs that if he were bitten again the poisonous venom seemed to have totally lost its power.

These operations kept the medicine man excessively busy for some time, but finally a triumphant shout from the crowd announced that every man held possession of a serpent, and then his motions ceased.

He appeared excessively fatigued, but he bore bravely up amidst the trying ordeal, and turning toward the serpents who were gathered en masse around the fire, he waved his hands above them, and muttering something in the Indian tongue, the squirming mass drew apart, affording him access to the fire.

Upon reaching it he cast a handful of herbs into the flames.

The fire leaped up with a fierce spurt, casting forth a radiant pink light, and a loud explosion followed.

The blazing embers spread in every direction. Some of the live coals fell among the coiled serpents. The compact mass writhed viciously together and fought desperately among themselves. They vented the most malignant hisses and sprang their rattles till the night air seemed sibilant with the repugnant sound.

But regardless of the perils that surrounded him, the brave medicine man trod fearlessly among the fighting serpents, and whispering gently to them, caused them to make way as he strode toward the fire, and raking it together with his staff, he replenished it with fresh fuel and resumed his incantations.

The Indians, who, notwithstanding their accustomed bravery, had started back at the unexpected explosion, returned to their posts on noticing their leader's intrepidity, and the medicine man tossed another supply of herbs upon the fire.

The flames leaped up again.

This time a white silvery light, rivaling the resplendency of the moon, leaped up, and as it shone around, a soft strain of plaintive music swept through the midnight air.

As the sound ceased, every serpent coiled itself up, and then a monster serpent, fully twenty feet long, came crawling down the cliff and approached the Indian priest.

The newcomer was as white as milk, and every scale shone and glittered in the firelight like shimmering silver.

Clasping their prizes to their breast, every Indian fell prostrate to the earth.

Then sinking upon his knees, with bowed head, the medicine man extended his hands toward the mystic visitant.

The serpent crept gracefully toward him, and weaving its glittering coils around him, approached its swaying head to his lips.

The medicine man seemed whispering something to it, and as if comprehending what he said, the reptile bowed its head, and darting forth its forked fangs placed them between his lips.

A loud reverberant crash followed the serpent kiss. The compact was sealed!

As the sound ceased the medicine man arose slowly to his feet. He staggered, visibly, and had it not been for the aid of his staff he would have fallen to the earth.

But weak and weary as he was, he managed to salute the white serpent as it crept leisurely away, followed by its mates.

As the Great Serpent disappeared with its hideous retinue, the medicine man arose to his feet and uttered a sigh; then holding up a tiny flask in the moonlight, he regarded it eagerly for an instant, and consigning it to his breast commanded his followers to arise.

They did so at once, and as he waved them away they hastily with-

drew into their tents, leaving the medicine man standing alone with the chief of the tribe.

He was an old man, and his hair was as white as snow.

When they were gone the old man approached the medicine man, and said in low tones:

"Is the boy secure?"

"Yes."

"Shall we go on?"

"Yes, Manitou has said it, and the White Serpent has conveyed his bidding. See!" He held up the tiny vial in his hand, and it sparkled in the clear moonlight like a diamond.

The aged sachem bowed his head reverently as he witnessed the sacred water.

"It is the water of oblivion!" said the medicine. "I have it from the mouth of Oki, and the White Serpent never lies! Come!"

Striding toward the center wigwam, from which he had appeared at the commencement of the mystic rites, the medicine drew aside the curtain which covered the opening and passed inside, followed by the white-haired chief.

As he dropped the curtain behind him, it seemed as if they were wrapped in total darkness, but as their eyes became more accustomed to the gloom, both saw a narrow shaft of moonlight penetrating the interior of the tent through a rift in the side.

As the light slanted downward in a radiant spray, it fell fully upon the features of a sleeping boy, who could not have been more than eight years old at the utmost limit.

The child was as fair as a lily, with ripe, peachy cheeks, and a wondrous mass of curls fell around his chubby neck and shoulders to the middle of the back, that shone in the halo like molten gold.

"He is very fair," said the sachem, eying him keenly.

"He will be dark enough presently," replied the medicine, with a grim approach at a smile; "mark the effect of this."

Lifting up the little sleeper in his arms, the medicine approached the flask to his lips. The boy opened his eyes sleepily, but as they fell upon the hideous trappings of the medicine, he pressed wildly back with a cry of fear, and seemed half frantic from terror.

The priest endeavored to quiet him, but the boy pushed off his hands and turned away his head.

The Indian held him closely, and turning back his head with ease, poured the contents of the vial down his throat.

The boy coughed and sputtered, endeavoring to force back the potion, but the medicine man held a firm grip on his nostrils until he had swallowed every drop of the mixture.

Presently the boy's struggles ceased; his eyes closed, his jaw dropped, and as the priest laid him back upon the couch of buffalo robes his face presented the aspect of death.

The old chief uttered a cry of alarm.

"Have no fear," said the medicine; "he's not dead, but sleepeth."

A sigh of gratification swelled from the old man's lips.

"He will awake?" asked he.

"Yes. Look!"

The white features of the lad were turning an ashen gray. Gradually the hue changed and the skin commenced to darken.

Several minutes passed.

The change deepened, and before fifteen minutes the boy's skin turned a pale copper color, almost as red as an Indian's, and his golden hair was a jet black.

The chief uttered a cry of surprise.

"Have I not said it?" asked the medicine, calmly.

"Yes, but when he awakes?"

"He will know nothing of the past," said the medicine man; "he has partaken of the water of oblivion!"

CHAPTER III.

THE DEATH OF WAKESAUKA.

TEN years have passed since the opening of our story.

It is near sunset in the year eighteen hundred and sixty.

The sergeant of the guard at Fort Laramie, at the junction of the Laramie River and the north fork of the Nebraska or Platte

River, had just dispatched a corporal with the relief guard to post pickets for the night, when a cloud of dust was seen rising far out upon the open prairie to the eastward in the direction of Snake River.

"I wonder what's up now, lieutenant?" said he to the officer of the guard, as he saluted and pointed toward the rising dust.

"Possibly a party of western-bound miners," replied the officer, looking up from the paper he was perusing.

"I don't believe it, sir," said the sergeant; "emigrants don't come that direction; besides that, 'tain't a big enough party, either, by the looks of the dust. I'll bet a day's rations of navy plug against a pint of blue head whisky that it's some of them pesky redskins what's been gettin' inter trouble again. They've been raisin' merry ructions lately, 'deed they have."

"That's so," said the officer, "but if they try any such games round here they'll get their belly full!"

"You bet!" coincided the sergeant.

Meanwhile the cloud of dust was rapidly approaching the fort, and finally it developed itself into half a dozen horsemen riding as if desperately pushed.

As they drew nearer it was discernible that they were Indians, although not in war paint and feathers, and in their midst they were carrying what appeared to be an inanimate body between them.

On reaching the fort one of the riders sprang hastily from the saddle and hailed the sentinel with a demand for "the white medicine or doctor," as the Indian tribes denominate the United States surgeons at the outposts and agencies.

The applicant was a tall young savage of lithe and willowy build, and apparently eighteen years of age.

His complexion was a pure olive, with a ruddy tinge on the cheeks, denoting the perfection of health. His eyes were dark hazel, and at times almost black, as they appeared at present, owing to the intense excitement under which he labored.

His clean-cut Grecian nose was pinched closely in at the nostrils, and his full, expansive chest swelled from the violence of his emotions.

His hair, which was black as ebony, fell in long, waving masses to the center of his back, and his lips quivered visibly as he made the urgent appeal.

His costume was considerably better than that of his companions, who appeared to be young braves of the Pawnee reservation.

It consisted of a deerskin hunting dress, with fringed skirts richly embroidered with beads and quills, as were his moccasins.

He wore leggings to match, and a tanned buffalo hide belt encircled his waist, in which was a brace of revolvers, a scalping knife, with a tomahawk suspended to a deerskin thong.

A well-greased lariat hung at his saddle bow, the latter appendage not being a portion of the outfit of his companions.

Across his shoulder hung a hunting rifle, slung ready for instant use, and a silver-tipped powder horn and deerskin bullet flask to match fell across his hunting pouch, while a single white plume in the headdress denoted his rank as chief.

He was superbly mounted, his steed being a black stallion of faultless build, with eyes like an eagle, and mettlesome and fiery as Satan himself.

As the young Indian made the demand the surgeon of the post chanced to be coming through the gate of the fort.

"What is it, my man?" asked he, carelessly, as he heard the inquiry.

The young chief's eyes fairly blazed at the nonchalant manner of the surgeon.

"I am Waucanta," said he, striking his breast sternly, and casting a piercing glance at the surgeon, "the White Serpent of the Pawnees. I have come to demand the life of my father, Wakesauka, the white-haired chief of our tribe."

"Who is your father?" asked the surgeon in somewhat politer tones, as he cast an admiring glance at the handsome boy. "Is he at the post?"

"No," replied the young chief, "he is here, and badly wounded. It was done by one of your race."

He waved his hand to his followers as he spoke, and four of them gently lifted a recumbent form from one of the horses, laying it upon the grass at the surgeon's feet.

The officer bent over it, and looking at the still face with its closed eyes, gently knelt down by the side.

He placed his finger on the pulse, and shook his head dubiously as a look of concern crossed his features.

"It is too late, my young friend," he said, sadly; "your father is dying. No earthly power can save him."

"Cannot you or your God give him life?" demanded the boy chief.

"I have no power; God alone can," replied the surgeon.

The Indian stamped his foot and bit his lips with rage.

"I would speak with him before he goes to the hunting grounds of his fathers," said he, "but I cannot make him speak, although I have called to him again and again."

"I think that I can do that much for you," replied the surgeon—"at least, I will try."

He took his medicine case from his pocket, and opening it, selected a small vial, pouring a few drops therefrom between the lips of the senseless chief.

The dose seemed to act like magic, for the old Indian opened his eyes and gazed slowly around him. They finally rested upon Waucanta—a wan smile penetrated his features as he held out his trembling hand.

The young chief took it and pressed it fondly between his own.

"Father!" he murmured, as his bosom worked convulsively with the intensity of his grief, but not a tear appeared. He had been too well trained in the teachings of his tribe to display a sign of emotion.

"It is well, my son," said the old man, as he returned the pressure of the hand.

"You have but a few moments to live," said the surgeon, kindly; "if you have anything to communicate to your son you had better do so quickly ere it is too late."

A strange, far-off look appeared in the eyes of the dying chief, but he seemed too weak to speak. He was evidently suffering from internal hemorrhage.

The surgeon administered another dose from his pocket case. It had the desired effect; the wounded man's eyes brightened somewhat, and making a violent effort, he contrived to speak.

"It is well, my son; Manitou has called, and I must obey his call. I am one hundred years to-day, and Wakesauka's race is well run. When I am gone you must succeed me. Be brave, be true, and obey me in all that I have commanded you. Mantego, the medicine man of our tribe, will tell you more—I cannot do so—my sight fails me, and I can hear the voice of the Great Spirit ringing in my ears—you are not what—you seem—you are a—your name is——"

Further utterance was stopped by a gush of blood that poured like a fountain from his lips, and sinking back in the arms of his son, the old man died.

A wail of agony burst from the group of Pawnees, but Waucanta simply bowed his head upon the bosom of his father.

CHAPTER IV.

OLD CATAMOUNT.

It was nearly nine o'clock upon the evening of the events described in the last chapter that a man dressed in the garb of a trapper pushed himself stoutly through a mass of tangled underbrush in an oak clearing near the edge of the prairie.

"Gol blame them cat-briars!" said he, disengaging several stout thorns from one of his rugged hands; "they're wuss than pizen and twice as nasty; they'd fairly tear the inards outen a feller if they onct got a good tough holt. Thank Jonah that I'm out'n the woods at last, for I'm desprut tired, and could eat the hoofs of an old army mule, I'm so all-fired hungry. I wonder what the old gal's got for supper? I know it'll be somethin' tasty, for she kin jist beat the speckled-faced Jews on fodder and sich like, but such a blasted silent-tongued woman I never seed in all my born days; she'd be a mortal blessin' in a Dorcas society, or a small female tea party—it would jist drive the gossips crazy to get anythin' outen her, it would, by Jonah! Dog my cats, but that was a purty shot I got in on that old Pawnee

this arternoon. I'll bet it settled his hash, and served him right! I've sworn ter kill the whole caboodle of 'em if my breath holds out long enough. Let's see—that makes fifty on 'em in ten years—not so bad for Old Catamount, as they calls me, after all. I swore to make it even with 'em when I found the poor gal lyin' senseless in the road with her baby clasped to her breast, and her poor husband lyin' dead alongside, with his body skewered with arrows, and hacked and mutilated beyond redemption, and I've kept my oath 'mazin' well, by Jonah! She allowed when she come to that she'd another, a bright boy of eight, who'd been snaked away by the red devils before they struck her down for dead. It's cussed queer, though, that they didn't serve her as they did her husband, and raise her scalp. Maybe they took pity on her. Some folks allow that they've got hearts and consciences like humans, but they can't stuff no sich fodder down the crop of Seth Shirley! I don't believe they've got anything but gizzerds and entrils like other carrion. I've lived too long among 'em ter believe different. It's a dead wonder to me that they hain't never put a slug of lead through my inards for the way I've served 'em since, 'deed it is, by Jonah! But I'll give 'em more yet, and run the risks, I will indeedy!"

While thus confabbing with himself the trapper, who was a man of some forty-five or fifty years of age, had been making tracks briskly through the clearing toward a log hut that stood in the center of the platte, with an open space of some quarter of a mile cleared around in every direction. He stalked boldly on with long strides at a slashing gait, looking warily around him as he proceeded. But nothing struck his gaze to excite his suspicion.

The clearing seemed utterly deserted, with the exception of himself; not even a bird or a jack-rabbit appeared in sight before he reached the cabin.

As he did so a ray of light came pouring through a long slit at one side of the strongly-built door, and the sound of footsteps was heard within.

"The old gal's allers on time," said the trapper, smiling pleasantly to himself. "It beats the deck, not'thstandin' her silent tongue, what an all-fired sharp ear she's got."

Just then the door opened, and the old man stretched forth his hand to greet an aged woman who stood inside.

Had he looked upward instead, he would have seen the painted features of two Indians scowling malignantly down upon him from the edge of the roof.

CHAPTER V.

WAUCANTA, THE WHITE SERPENT OF THE PAWNEES.

LET us return to Waucanta, the White Serpent.

As the death wail of the Pawnee braves over their deceased chief died away on the evening breeze, and each Indian bowed his head dejectedly upon his bosom, the boy chief slowly arose from his kneeling posture by his father's corpse.

For an interval he stood looking steadily at the setting sun with his piercing eyes, as if he were watching the flight of his father's spirit to the happy hunting grounds.

His lips were firmly compressed, and his nostrils pinched and drawn, as the breath came and went determinedly from his heaving bosom.

But not a tear dimmed his sight, or a sigh parted his quivering lips.

Thus stood the boy chief, with his arms folded tightly about his heaving chest, and then he turned away and bit his lips until the blood followed the incision.

"I am sorry for you, my friend," said the kindly surgeon; "I would to Heaven I could have aided you further, but it was impossible."

"It is well," said the young Pawnee, sharply; "it is over, and the gray plover has conveyed the spirit of my father to his long home; the white medicine has done his best."

"That's a fact," replied the surgeon, "and if you require the services of our men in burying the body, I can safely assure you that the commandant of the post will furnish a burial party."

"It will be needless," replied the boy; "my braves will see to that; the old men will sing his death song; not a hand but those of his own tribe shall lay touch upon his body, much less the desecrating hand of the accursed race that brought him to his death."

"Be it as you please," returned the surgeon; "I have made the offer, it is all that I can do."

Then as he turned away toward the fort he said, addressing the sergeant, who by this time had finished relieving post:

"See to it, orderly, that these men are furnished provisions, and serve them a ration of whisky each."

"Yes, sir."

And as he saluted the surgeon entered the fort arm in arm with the officer of the day, to go to supper, the call to which had just been sounded.

But the Indians, at the command of their young chief, utterly refused to partake of the proffered provisions, as they gently lifted the remains of the dead chief, and fastening him to the back of one of the horses, remounted and rode slowly away in the direction whence they had come.

"That looks bad," said the sergeant to the corporal, as he shook his head dubiously.

"Why?"

"That fellow's got his mad up clean to the top of his top-knot—he means mischief, and don't you forget it, either—I never knowed a redskin to go back on his whisky before!"

And with this wise prognostication the sergeant also went to quarters.

Meanwhile the Pawnee warriors rode slowly onward until they struck off the prairie into a dense tract of pine and cedars.

They had scarcely entered it when the boy chief suddenly drew rein and held up his hand for his comrades to halt.

They obeyed the signal instantly, and leaping from his saddle, Waucanta fell flat upon his face and laid his ear closely to the earth.

Presently he lifted it again and arose to his feet.

"It is well," said he, as if thinking aloud, "the old medicine of the Pawnees approaches, but he comes too late; he should have come before, and my father would have lived still."

The Indians bowed their heads as if coinciding with him.

Some minutes passed, and the rapid galloping of a horse was heard, and presently a horseman hove in sight.

He was riding at a break-neck speed, but as he approached the party he reined in his steed and came to a full stop.

He was Mantego, the Indian doctor, whom we introduced to the reader in the opening chapter of our story.

"It is well," said he, leaping from his horse and approaching the White Serpent.

"It is not well," was the stern reply.

"Why?"

"Look!"

The young chief went to the dead chief's horse and drew aside the blanket that concealed the corpse.

The medicine man uttered a wild cry of pain, and tore his hair frantically with his hands.

"Dead!" hissed he; "who has done this?"

"The bullet of the Catamount!" replied Waucanta, bitterly.

"May the curses of the Spirit of Evil descend upon him and wither up his hand! May all the plagues of utter darkness fall upon him and blast him with their spells!"

"It is recorded," said the boy chief. "So mote it be!"

"When did it happen?"

"This afternoon," replied Waucanta, "as we rode through the forest the report of the white man's fire weapon rang out shrill and sharp, and the spirit of the white-haired chief was called home."

"And did no one attempt to avenge his death?" retorted Mantego, savagely.

"Yes, but it was too late, the Catamount was too swift of foot—he was gone before we could fire in return."

"Malediction! his blood crieth aloud for vengeance!" said the boy chief, with a metallic ring in his tones that boded no good to the old trapper; "but the Gray Wolf and Black Panther are on his trail—by my orders they are to capture him alive and bring him to the camp in the mountains; when this be done he shall be sacrificed to appease the spirit of my father."

"Spoken like the true son of Wakesauka," said the medicine, rub-

bing his hands with satisfaction. "Menelonga and Onega will not fail."

"They have sworn to die first!"

"All hail to the new chief of the Pawnee nation," said the medicine. "Young men of the tribe, salute your new commander."

Every brave sprang from his steed and gathered in a circle around the medicine and the new chief, brandishing their rifles and tomahawks savagely in the air.

As they did so Mantego made a motion toward the White Serpent.

The boy bent his body somewhat and bowed his head with reverential awe, as he removed his headdress.

The Indian doctor stooped down, and picking up a handful of fresh earth, tossed it solemnly upon the youth's forehead and upturned scalp lock, then taking a flask from his pocket he poured some of the contents over the long black flowing hair.

"Waucanta," said he, in a shrill, ringing voice, "I pronounce you the leader of the Pawnees. Braves of the tribe, salute your chief. The Great Spirit wills it, and it is done."

Again the Indians brandished their weapons fiercely in the air, and the shrill notes of the war whoop rang significantly out through the rustling trees.

Then remounting their horses at a signal from the new commander, the whole party resumed their interrupted journey to the camp amidst the fastnesses of the Black Hills.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NOISE ON THE ROOF.

As Seth Shirley, or Old Catamount, crossed the threshold of the rude log cabin the woman drew to the door and barred it behind him.

"You have returned at last!" she asked.

"Yes," replied the trapper; "but what is the matter? By Jonah, you're as white as a ghost!"

"Mother has been worried about you, urcle; she has been fretting all the afternoon."

The speaker was a tall, well-built girl of some twelve years or so of age, dressed in a plain suit of homemade manufacture, but plain and rude as was the material and cut of the garments, it was impossible to hide the sweet simplicity of the pure young face with its ruddy cheeks, arched lips and clear blue eyes, encircled by a curling mass of shining golden hair, that fell like a veil around her neck and shoulders down to the very waist.

"Scared about me, hey, Clover," said the old man, drawing the child playfully to his side and smoothing down her curls as he pressed a kiss upon her upturned face as she clung lovingly to him. "And was you scared too, my little wild rose?"

"No," retorted the child, smiling cheerfully, "and I told mother she needn't be neither. Why should we worry 'bout you, urcle; didn't you have old thunder along? And when you have him I know you are perfectly safe."

She took the old man's trusty rifle from his hand as she spoke, and petting it playfully with her own, placed it against the chimney side of the broad open fireplace.

"It's right ye are," said Seth, with a chuckling laugh as he rubbed his hands with gratification at the child's compliment; "and you can bet your little boots, Clover, that I never go twenty rods from the roof tree without old thunder's along; it would be as much as my life's worth, little gal; it would, by Jonah! By gumps, I believe the red devils would treat me wuss than the old whale did the old prophet, and swallow me whole, but I'll bet they couldn't stomach me no three days and nights, the way the whale did Jonah—not by a jug full of post commissary; bet they couldn't. But what yer got for supper, little gal? Let's see the provender, for I'm as hungry and thirsty as an army mule after a three days' fast on the great salt desert."

"Oh, mother's got you just a bully venison stew, and I made you some nice hot corn dodgers—indeed I did, and did it all myself, without the slightest help."

"That's the sort," said Seth, as he drew his chair up to the table where Clover Halliday was arranging the hot Indian cakes, as her mother dished up the smoking stew from a huge pot suspended from

the crane, and poured the old man a steaming bowl of coffee to top off with. "You'll beat your mother yet, little gal, if you keep on as you do now, and go her twice better on the chin music. But whar on earth's Death and Danger? The durned critter played me a mean trick, and give me the slip this afternoon—'deed he did. I'll cut the hide outer him."

"I hain't seen him," replied Clover, "but take your supper, uncle, and never fear but he'll turn up safe and sound before we go to bed."

"I dare say you're right, little one," said the old man, bringing himself to anchor at the table and falling to like a famished man upon the edibles, that rapidly disappeared before his vigorous attack, "and for that good word of yours I'll let the old dog off for onct on your account."

Mrs. Halliday, Clover's mother, was scarcely more than fifty years of age, although her white hair and wrinkled face gave her a much older appearance.

As has been hinted at by Seth in a previous portion of the story, she was the widow of a western-bound emigrant, who had been murdered by the Indians.

Her husband, Reuben Halliday, an esteemed farmer, residing near St. Louis, having been seized with the California gold fever in 1850, had sold his farm, and providing himself with a road wagon, had started with his wife, son and daughter, the two latter aged respectively eight and two years, for the El Dorado of the West.

On the way out, while near Fort Laramie, he had been attacked and killed by the Indians, who carried off the boy, leaving the wounded mother with her infant in her arms.

In this condition Mrs. Halliday had been discovered by Seth Shirley, who took her to his cabin and nursed her with the utmost attention.

A year passed before she was sufficiently recovered to tell her story, but the poor woman's nervous system had been so thoroughly prostrated by the loss of her husband and boy that her brain became affected, and although she was perfectly able to perform the duties of housekeeper, to which position she had been appointed by Seth, the United States surgeon at Fort Laramie had pronounced it his opinion that unless some sudden and startling change occurred, she would ultimately sink and drift into utter imbecility; and thus it was owing to Mrs. Halliday's loss of memory, or obstinate determination to reveal nothing of the past, that ten years had elapsed without the old trapper's being able to discover anything concerning the previous history of the unfortunate woman.

"Hark!"

Mrs. Halliday made the remark just as they were finishing supper.

"What's up?" inquired Seth, gulping down his second bowl of coffee.

"Did you hear nothing?"

"No."

"There it is again."

This time all three heard it.

It was a scratching, rustling sound on the roof of the building, but so excessively low that it would have been scarcely noticeable to an unpracticed ear.

"There's some one there," said Clover, looking anxiously toward the old trapper.

"Yes," said he, nodding his head significantly toward her mother; "but don't say nothing, and I'll see what it is."

He went to the large, open fireplace and looked eagerly up.

The fire had died down upon the hearth, and the chimney was dark as pitch.

Again the low, scratching sound came upon the roof, and as it ceased Old Catamount seized his trusty rifle, and setting his teeth stoutly together, began climbing up the chimney.

CHAPTER VII.

DEATH AND DANGER.

It took Seth scarcely a minute to mount the chimney, which was composed of logs lined with mud, but so silent were his movements

that he contrived to poke out his head and reconnoiter the situation without alarming the occupants of the roof.

It was an extremely dark night, the moon having disappeared behind a dense bed of clouds that were lowering up from the west, and the occasional flashes of lightning and accompanying roll of thunder announced that a heavy storm was rapidly creeping up.

But Seth's eyes were as keen and piercing as those of his cat-like namesake, and he could see in the dark with equal facility as by day, and thus, as he scarcely elevated the top of his nose above the chimney pot he saw the two Indians lying flat on the roof close to the eaves.

"Ha, ha, my covies," thought the old man, "it's thar yer are, and up to a nice little game maybe, yer think, but I'll block it, by Jonah! I'd pick yer both off in less than a wink only that thar might be some more of the same kidney hangin' around loose. What on earth shall I do? By gumps, I've got it! I'll just drop down alongside an' slice thar whizzens with my toothpick."

Suiting the action to the word, Seth slung his rifle hastily over his shoulder, and drawing his bowie knife he placed it between his teeth; then getting over the chimney top he commenced crawling down the sloping roof with the utmost caution.

So careful and silent was the approach of the old trapper that, had not a mishap occurred, he would doubtless have succeeded in carrying out his intention of slicing the Indians' throats; but, unfortunately, just as he was on the point of making the attempt, his foot slipped on a portion of the roof, and with a sudden lurch he missed his grip, and came thundering down upon them like an avalanche.

The two spies could not have been taken more thoroughly by surprise if a landslide had indeed descended upon them. They were lying in wait where they were to use the same mode of entering the trapper's ranch as he had used to quit it in search of them, hoping by this means to be able to take him by surprise, effect an easy capture, and convey him to their camp in the hills, in compliance with the orders of the White Serpent.

But as Old Catamount came bumping and thumping down the roof, making night lively with his curses, Black Panther and Gray Wolf drew their knives and elevated themselves upon their knees to receive him.

But the old man was no lightweight, and the velocity of his descent gave him double impetus as he struck the two Indians amidships, and all hands toppled over the side of the roof and went crashing to the earth beneath.

The Indians struck first, as a matter of course, but Seth, who had unfortunately caught his foot in a knot in the roof, turned a complete somersault and landed plump upon his head.

For an instant a thousand stars seemed to dance before his eyes, and a tingling sensation pervaded his spine, leading him to believe that he had dislocated his neck.

But tossing off the stagnant feeling by a stout effort of his will, he leaped to his feet, and grasping one of the Indians with a tenacious grip around the throat, he held him pinned firmly to the earth.

"By Jonah!" shouted he, as he tightened his hold until the red-skin's tongue lolled from his mouth and his eyes darted from his head, "I've got you fast, my hearty, and I'm going to choke the lights outen yer!"

The Indian strove to shout aloud, but the cry died in his throat with a guttural sound, and at the same instant Gray Wolf leaped to his feet and darted to the assistance of his comrade.

Seth's back was toward him, and in the heat of the struggle he did not hear his approach; but forgetting his instructions to capture the old man alive, the Indian drew back his knife and made a stroke at the center of Seth's shoulders.

Seth felt the blow just in time to save his life.

The blade had struck the barrel of his rifle, and glancing off cut a keen slash in the deerskin hunting dress.

Loosening his grasp upon the throat of the prostrate Pawnee, who was in the last throes of strangulation, Seth leaped nimbly aside and turned savagely upon his assailant.

"Gol durn yer ugly red picter," shouted he, breathing hard as he met a second stroke and parried it with his knife blade, "want to plug me in the back, do yer? Take that!"

With a quick, short blow he plunged the knife at Black Panther's heart, but the Indian also evaded the stroke and sprang nimbly aside,

and at it they went, cutting and slashing madly at each other in the most desperate and vindictive manner.

The knife blades rang and clashed together, darting forth sparks of fire amid the darkness, and the hard breathing of the combatants was distinctly heard, but they fought determinedly on, neither one being willing to budge or grant an inch of ground.

Meanwhile the half-strangled Indian, released from the remorseless grip of the old trapper, was beginning to recover his wind.

Sitting up he gasped for breath, and stretching forth his arms sat for a brief interval watching the contest between Seth and his comrade.

He had fully enough of his single-handed contest with Old Catamount to be extremely cautious of attacking him alone, but as he grew somewhat stronger, noticing that Onega was getting decidedly worsted in the conflict, he arose to his feet and darted quickly behind the old trapper, elevating his tomahawk to deal him a death blow.

But scarcely had the deadly instrument been reared aloft when a rustling sound was heard in the adjoining underbrush, and the next instant a thickset, sturdy-looking bulldog, with red, flaming eyes and protruding tongue, leaped from the bushes and darted directly at the burly neck of the savage.

With a howl of mortal terror the Indian's nerveless hand dropped by his side, and the tomahawk fell to the earth as he vainly struggled to beat off the maddened dog which was clinging like a leech to his throat.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the old trapper, as he witnessed the proceeding and cut vigorously away with his bowie knife at his antagonist.

"'Death and Danger' has come at last! I knew he wouldn't fail me at a pinch. Go in, four-foot! I'll stand to you every time!"

The dog seemed to comprehend his master's words, but he never loosened his grip, as he tugged savagely away at the throat of the Indian. The Gray Wolf had met a more deadly foe than Old Catamount himself.

The trapper seemed so pleased at the timely appearance of his dog that, for a second, he forgot his usual caution, but he was called to time by feeling a cold thrill running through his guard arm.

The Black Panther had given him an ugly cut with his knife.

Old Catamount turned hastily to return the blow, but the wary savage had taken advantage of the proffered chance and escaped into the bushes.

CHAPTER VIII.

CLOVER TO THE RESCUE.

"Cuss my infernal carelessness!" roared old Seth, as he bound up his wounded arm and uttered a string of oaths, "the red skunk has escaped!"

"Let go!" shouted he to the dog. "Go out!"

In a second the bulldog ceased worrying the dying savage and obeyed his master's mandate, darting swiftly away in pursuit of the Black Panther.

Without pausing to look at Menelongo, Seth unslung his rifle and leaped after the dog.

Away they both went slashing madly through the underbrush, the dog in advance. Seth could hear him bounding onward after the retreating savage, whose footsteps were still distinctly to be heard.

"I'll bet he'll get him!" whispered he to himself. "I never knew Death and Danger to miss the game!"

And then he ran on, looking carefully to the priming of his rifle.

For a few moments he could hear the pattering footsteps of the dog, and then they suddenly ceased.

"What's up now?" whispered he; "something wrong, I'll bet!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before a blanket was thrown suddenly over his head, and he felt the noose of a lasso tightening about his waist.

Then he heard the guttural expressions of a number of Indians, and felt their hands upon him.

He was a prisoner!

But bound and trammelled as he was, he fought desperately to release himself.

His arms were still free, and he struck wildly out in the darkness.

He kicked out front and rear, sending several of his captors to grass, but resistance was useless, and presently he was borne to the earth and firmly bound with stout deerskin thongs, and then he felt himself being lifted up and carried away by the strong arms of his captors.

Let us return to Clover and her mother, whom we left in the trapper's cabin when Old Catamount ascended the chimney in search of the Indians.

For some time the frightened girl remained anxiously watching the wide open fireplace. She heard the struggle on the roof, and turned toward her mother at the sound, but Mrs. Halliday had sunk into a seat beside the fireplace and remained inactive and listless.

"Did you hear that, mother?" asked the child, but Mrs. Halliday made no reply.

Clover went boldly to the door, notwithstanding the tumultuous beatings of her heart, and listened attentively.

She could hear the sound of the scuffle outside until it ceased, and then she returned to her mother's side and crouched down beside her.

"Where is uncle?" inquired the child.

"Hush!" replied Mrs. Halliday, looking steadily into the dying embers on the hearth, "I can hear them now—the death shots are ringing in my ears. I can see the flying arrows whizzing through the air! Ha! they have torn my boy from my side! they raise their hatchets above his head—mercy! mercy! have pity on his mother! are ye men? will you kill a defenseless child? you have slain my husband; will you take my all?"

The poor woman uttered a piercing shriek and rocked her frame unsteadily to and fro upon her seat.

Clover regarded her with wild, staring eyes; she had never beheld her mother so terribly excited before.

"Mother," whispered she, twining her arms lovingly around the distracted woman's neck, "look at me; have you not your little Clover left?"

Mrs. Halliday turned toward her and regarded her with eyes blazing with the light of insanity.

"Yes, my child," replied she, notwithstanding her terrible emotion, "you are the only one I have left in the wide, wide world!"

The poor woman clasped Clover earnestly to her bosom as she moaned the words.

Clover returned the caresses passionately.

"Mother," whispered she; "we are alone; there is no one with us, what shall we do?"

"Hark!" whispered Mrs. Halliday, suddenly straightening herself up. "What is that?"

There came a low, scratching sound at the door.

Clover cowered by her side.

Again the mysterious sound ensued, accompanied by a plaintive whine.

"It is Death and Danger!" shouted the child, springing to her feet; "it is Death and Danger, and we are safe!"

Clover bounded lightly to the door as she spoke, and withdrawing the bar, threw it wide open.

As she did so Seth's bulldog leaped into the room.

His head was covered with blood, but his red, fiery eyes looked lovingly up into the face of his young mistress as he began tugging at her skirts.

"See," said Clover, turning toward her mother.

"It is well!" shouted the mad woman, with a piercing shriek. "The dog has come to lead us to his side. Our benefactor is in danger—we must go to rescue him!"

And tossing a blanket shawl around the head of Clover, and taking another herself, she seized a brace of revolvers from the mantel and darted out into the darkness after the dog, who led the way.

CHAPTER IX.

SAVED FROM DEATH.

As the Pawnee scouts bore Old Catamount along, he still struggled with the desperation of despair to release himself, but notwithstand-

ing his utmost efforts, they utterly failed, until he was forced from sheer fatigue to cease the contest against fate.

Although his eyes and face were completely covered by the clinging blanket, which utterly blinded and nearly stifled him, he realized that they had branched off from the deer path that had been taken by Death and Danger.

He knew this from the rustling of leaves and crackling of dry twigs beneath their moccasined feet as they pattered swiftly on.

He also occasionally felt the sharp rebound of some stray sapling or branch, as, released from the hands of the advance guard, it rebounded back, delivering a sharp thump against some portion of his unprotected body.

"Gol blame yer skulking carcasses," shouted he, half mad from rage; "blame yer to fire and blazes, and cuss my pig-headed blindness that I didn't keep a lookout around when I lost sight of the dog. I might a knowed that some all-fired mischief was up; yes, indeedy, I might, by Jonah! I wonder what happened to the poor cur, though. I wonder whether the red skunks hev cooked his goose—'deed if they has and I ever get out of this scrape alive, I'll have vengeance on the whole caboodle of 'em for every hair of his carkis! 'Deed and I will that, by Jonah!"

And then his thoughts returned to the log cabin where he had left his housekeeper seated by the fireside on the broad hearth. "What on earth will the old gal and little rosebud think of my pertracted absence," continued he, communing with himself as the Indians bore him swiftly along. "Maybe they heard me piling down the bloody old roof like a tumble bug, and if they did they'll likely enough conclude that I've slipped my wind as well as my holt. It's pesky hard, it is, by Jonah, that I can't send 'em a message—if Death and Danger was alive I might contrive somehow to do so, but if the red skunks has slit his whizzen I'm afraid the jig's up, by Jonah!"

He little thought that the sagacious brute had been performing the very duty that he would have assigned him had he been at his side just then; for when the old trapper had fallen into the Indian ambush his dog, who had been several yards in advance, had been suddenly stricken down by the war club of one of the secreted savages, but owing to the tough nature of the animal's skull the blow had simply stunned for a time, and when he recovered, exhibiting almost human sagacity, he slunk cautiously away to the cabin to notify Mrs. Halliday and Clover of old Seth's peril.

Meanwhile, as Seth was thus soliloquizing, the Indians bore him steadily along until he could hear the thunderous roar of a waterfall that he knew well was situated at the edge of Great Canon, on the south fork of the Belle Fourche or Big Cheyenne River, which girds the foot of the Black Hills. This river runs in a northeasterly course and opens into the upper waters of the Missouri, near Fort Bennett.

But he could tell, from the way they were heading, that they were not going toward the fort, and, as they laid him down to rest a bit, Seth surmised that they were taking him up the mountains, possibly for the purpose of torture and death at the stake.

This was not a pleasant contemplation, by any means, and the old man's fears were augmented by hearing one of the savages coming toward him.

"The Old Catamount is a prisoner at last," said his tormentor, kicking him stoutly with his foot; "how does he like the situation?"

"I'd like it a heap better, old copper snoot, if you were in my place instead," responded Seth, "and I'd like a breath of fresh air, if yer don't want ter shut off my wind all ter onct."

"Good!" grunted the redskin stooping down and releasing the folds of the blanket somewhat, thus affording Seth a chance to breathe more freely. "The White Serpent has ordered that not a hair of your head is to be harmed until you are brought to torture. He will make you dance on fire and howl for mercy."

"I'll see you all hanged first!" shouted Seth, angrily, "and then I won't—you may carve, cut, burn and burst my inards afore ye'll get a lion-squeal out of the Catamount—so put that in your pipe and smoke it—say!"

The Indian nodded his head and indulged in a chuckling grunt.

"The old man crows loud now," said he, "but wait until the wigwams of our old men and young braves is reached, and he'll cry another song. He won't be near so loud when he feels the flame."

"Just you keep on thinking so, you bloody old galoot!" shouted Seth, drawing up his right foot and planting his moccasin directly in the center of the Indian's stomach. "Just try a taste of that and see

how you like it—Old Catamount ain't dead yet by a jogful, as ye'll all find to yer cost before ye're rid of him."

The Indian uttered a howl of pain, and clasping both hands stoutly over his injured pouch, staggered away a pace or so and fell on the broad of his back, vainly trying to cast up his supper from the effect of his internal agony.

Old Seth fairly roared with delight. The contortions of the disabled savage seemed to afford him the greatest gratification; and so loud and cutting was the laughter of the trapper that in less than a minute the redskin leaped savagely to his feet, and raising his tomahawk, whirled it around his head, sending the whizzing weapon directly at the old man's forehead.

Seth witnessed the motion with no little alarm. He was so firmly bound around the arms that he could scarcely stir the upper portion of his body, but he endeavored to turn his neck as far as possible aside to avoid the death stroke.

On flew the deadly missile directly at the mark, and in another second it would have cleft the prostrate trapper's skull and brained him where he lay, had not an intercepting hand caught it by the handle and restrained its course.

"Hah!" shouted Seth's rescuer, in commanding accents. "What would you do?—how dare you disobey my orders?"

The enraged Indian cowered beneath the glance, and bowed his head with shame.

The newcomer was Waucanta, the White Serpent of the Pawnees.

"I was enraged beyond endurance," replied the Indian; "did you witness the indignity offered me?"

"Yes," replied the chief, "but you should have borne it patiently for the sake of vengeance. You should have obeyed and trusted me to be repaid for the blow—yours shall be the first hand to hurl the hatchet when the Catamount is fastened to the stake—but it is mine to deliver the death blow—has he not slain my father?"

The Indian bowed his head with reverential respect.

"It is well spoken," said he; "the White Serpent is wise-tongued!"

"The White Serpent cannot lie," responded Waucanta, "his tongue is not forked as others. Welememock shall arrange the blow. But come, we have awaited too long already, and must resume our journey to the mountains, for the death fire must be ready at the rising of the moon."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Seth reassuringly to himself. "In that case it will never be lighted, for the devil's own storm is brewing, unless I'm greatly mistaken, and I seldom miss my geering on weather predictions."

But the next instant his cogitations were cut short by the blankets being thrown over his head, and then he was taken up again by his captors and borne swiftly away.

As the party disappeared Death and Danger poked his head through the bushes at one side of the path, and presently Mrs. Halliday followed, leading Clover by the hand.

CHAPTER X.

THE BALL OF FIRE.

THE bulldog gave a low, significant sniff, but strange to say never uttered a growl, but taking trail followed swiftly on with his nose to the ground, while his red eyes blazed with an angry light.

Mrs. Halliday followed closely in his tracks, keeping a sharp lookout after the Indians, who were bearing Seth directly up the side of the mountains.

After pursuing this course for half an hour or more the red light of an Indian camp fire was visible, and as the party approached the barking of Indian dogs was heard.

As the sounds multiplied Death and Danger paused and rubbed his nose against the damp dress of the mad woman.

She paused and patted his bleeding head, on which the blood was beginning to congeal.

"Hush!" whispered she, in a warning tone, and the dog crept slowly away into the bushes.

Then she proceeded on, closely followed by Clover.

As they reached the encampment a number of old men and squaws

gathered around the party, and a host of Indian children came crowding around.

Then the captors fastened Seth to a stake in the center of the wigwams near the fire.

This being done the braves and old men gathered around Waucanta to hold a consultation, while the squaws and children went to the prisoner, and began mouthing and gibbering maliciously at him as they proceeded to fling mud and filth into his face.

Now and then one of the women would dart suddenly forward and spit in his face, or strike him viciously with her open hand, while the youngsters amused themselves by poking sharp sticks into various portions of his frame.

Seth knew it would be useless to protest, and bore the torment with the utmost equanimity, never uttering a groan, which seemed to displease his besiegers considerably, but the old trapper simply replied to their torments with a mocking laugh.

"Keep it up," said he, derisively; "I can bear it as long as you, and a darn sight better, got blame you all!"

And then gritting his teeth determinedly, he calmly awaited the ending of the Indian pow-wow!

Presently it ceased, and Waucanta approached, followed by his braves.

At a motion from him the squaws and children withdrew to a slight distance, and the others surrounded Seth.

The eyes of the old men were cold, stern, and determined, while those of the young braves scintillated with a wicked, vengeful light.

"It has been determined that you must die," said the boy chief, addressing the old trapper.

"I know it," said the old man, "but it ain't goin' ter happen to-night."

"How do you know that?" asked Waucanta.

"The voice of the Great Spirit tells me so!"

"The white man's eyes are blind," was the reply; "he is to die at the rising of the moon."

"The moon won't rise," said Seth, "the storm won't let it appear."

As he spoke the distant sound of thunder was heard.

"It is the voice of Manitou, calling for vengeance," shouted the chief.

"It is the voice of the storm," answered the trapper.

"The Catamount has a lying tongue," replied Waucanta, pointing to the east. "See!"

Seth turned his eyes in the indicated direction, and to his intense surprise saw a round, red disc slowly rising on the verge of the hills.

"Thunder and lightning, what on earth is that?" gasped the mystified hunter, gazing in amazement at the strange sight.

"It is the moon," said Waucanta. "Welememock, stand forth."

With a whoop of savage satisfaction, the Indian to whom Seth had so recently administered the kick darted into the circle, brandishing his tomahawk threateningly around his head.

His eyes were fairly blazing with a demoniac light as he ranged himself in front of the old trapper.

But Seth's eyes never quailed beneath the vindictive gaze as he stood firmly bound to the torture post, and regarded the savage with ineffable scorn.

"Me cut off Catamount's left ear now," roared the infuriated brute. "Look out!"

Poising his weapon for an instant above his head, and balancing himself stoutly with one knee bent under him and the other slightly advanced, the Indian sent the hatchet spinning directly at the head of the captive trapper.

Seth could see it coming with a warning hiss, but he never budged an inch as the blade buried itself in the post close beside his ear, where he could hear it quivering and humming from the terrific force of the blow.

Had he moved or stirred it would undoubtedly have brained him on the spot, but he knew, notwithstanding the Indian's boast, that he dared not harm a hair of his head, seriously, until the young chief gave the word, or took the initiative himself. He also knew if he displayed the slightest fear that his tormentors would proceed to the utmost limits of torture before putting him to the crowning and fatal ordeal of fire, and, thus nerving himself for the test, he boldly faced the foe without moving a muscle, as Welememock withdrew wrathfully and gave place to Wetaunee, or Gray Cloud. The young Indian stood

calmly facing Seth for a moment, as if considering the most vulnerable point to assail and startle him from his imperturbable demeanor.

Then, quick as a flash, he whisked his bow from his shoulder, and fitting an arrow drew the string to the tip of his ear.

Twang!

Whiz!

Ping!

The keen point of the barb cleft a tiny portion from Seth's cheek, drawing a little path of blood, and causing him, as he afterwards remarked, to feel as if a big icicle had been plunged down his spine, but he never moved or faltered, as the arrow pinioned his head as closely on one side as the tomahawk did on the other.

"By gumps!" thought Old Catamount to himself, "that's putty nice shootin', and mighty sharp shavin'. I wonder what is the next piece of deviltry they'll be up to?"

Gray Cloud withdrew, and Shemawgua, the Black Otter, took his place.

He, too, stood a moment in careful consideration, and then, with a ferocious yell, made a bound for the victim.

Two leaps brought him to the stake, and as he reached it he drew his scalping knife and flourished it menacingly before Seth's eyes; then, slashing down with a quick cut, he passed it directly beneath the nose.

So hasty was the move that the old man scarcely comprehended its import until he felt the keen blade slicing between his mustache and nostrils, slightly severing the cartilage of the nose, and had not his head been so securely fastened between the tomahawk and arrow it is doubtful if, with all his cool intrepidity, he could have kept from dodging back at the attack, had not a sudden shout from the surrounding Pawnees attracted his attention.

"What in blazes is up now?" thought Seth, as he saw the young savage bound away with a cry of alarm. "What in thunder's the row?"

He could see that there was something seriously amiss, for the whole party had gathered closely around the boy chief and were gesticulating and jabbering in the wildest and most incoherent manner, but presently he saw Waucanta wave his hand toward the center wigwam, and then one of the Indians ran toward it and knocked upon a shield hanging at the side.

A loud, clashing sound followed.

The curtains of the tent swept aside and an old Indian appeared in the opening.

He seemed questioning the messenger for a moment, and then placing his hands over his eyes looked anxiously towards the east.

The next instant he gave a wild cry of alarm and disappeared within the tent. As he did so the squaws uttered shouts of dismay and ran shrieking to their wigwams, followed by their yelling children.

Then Seth saw the Pawnee warriors looking anxiously toward the east.

A flash of lightning, accompanied by a terrific burst of thunder, followed, and turning his eyes in the same direction, Seth saw a huge ball of fire rolling down the mountain side.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SPIRIT OF THE FLAMES.

As the astonished trapper beheld the strange phenomenon, he felt something tugging at his legs, and then he heard a low voice exclaim:

"Don't be frightened, uncle; we have come to rescue you!"

Then Seth felt the thongs that secured his limbs severed by a knife, and a revolver was forced into his hands, as the voice whispered again:

"Don't move until you hear the cry of an owl; then strike for your life; your rifle is close behind you!"

The next moment a vivid flash of lightning followed, accompanied by a sonorous peal of thunder, and the storm which had threatened for the last hour burst with terrific violence.

The sky was black as ink, and the rain poured down in torrents.

Blinding flashes of lightning followed in rapid succession, and the reverberating thunder shook the Black Hills to their very center.

Meanwhile the mysterious ball of fire continued its course down the mountain side. It toppled over boulder and hummock, and rolled amidst the pines and cedars, until it paused just behind the prisoner, hissing and sputtering in a frightful and appalling manner amidst the pouring rain.

The Indians appeared spellbound at the startling spectacle, and seemed unable to stir, when suddenly the flaps of the center wigwam opened and Mantego, the medicine man of the Pawnees, sprang out, garbed in his mystic robes.

Leaping into the center of the startled group, he waved aloft a couple of flaming torches, which he whirled threateningly around his head, muttering his incantations in the Pawnee tongue.

But the words seemed to have no effect, for the mysterious ball of fire blazed on with deeper intensity than before.

It darted forth scintillating sparks of fire, it shot up shoots of lurid light; now it appeared almost on the point of expiring, and then it seemed inspired with new life, and burst out with a fiercer glow than ever.

Meanwhile the medicine man continued leaping frantically to and fro, gibbering and grimacing, bowing and kneeling, beating his breast, hips, knees and head with the butts of the blazing torches as he whirled them excitedly around his figure.

But all apparently to no purpose, for the hideous mummery had not the slightest effect on the mystic flame.

"It is the spirit of flame!" shouted he, pausing in his efforts, with the perspiration pouring down his painted features in streams.

The Indians bowed their heads with expressions of awe.

But the words had scarcely quitted the lips of the medicine man before a voice came shrieking back, louder than the roar of the storm:

"It is not the Spirit of Flame, it is but one of his agents; but if you do not permit the prisoner to go in peace, the spirit will appear to destroy you!"

"He shall not go!" shouted Waucanta, in reply. "He shall die the death——"

"Never!"

At the same moment the ominous cry of a night owl rang out clear and shrill, and as it ceased Seth leaped from the torture stake.

Waucanta danced with rage, and leaped toward him, hurling his tomahawk directly at his head.

But the blow was not quick enough.

Seth ducked his head, and the missile whizzed harmlessly past, as the sharp crack of the hunter's pistol was heard.

For once Seth missed his aim, and leaping toward the stake, he discharged his weapon again.

A shrill cry followed the shot, and one of the Pawnees fell to the earth, writhing in mortal agony.

The Indians uttered a howl of rage and sprang toward their victim in a body.

Again and again the deadly revolver was discharged with fearful effect.

At every fresh shot an Indian bit the dust.

But the chambers were empty in an instant, as, consigning the useless weapon to his belt, Seth leaped behind the stake to grasp his trusty rifle.

In an instant Old Thunder was secured, and turning toward the approaching foe the old trapper sent a bullet crashing through the skull of the foremost brave.

As the Indian sank down with the blood pouring in streams from his shattered forehead, his comrades surrounded Seth and stretched forth their hands to capture him alive.

But the old man whirled the rifle swiftly around his head, dealing deadly blows in every direction.

He could hear the crunching of an Indian's skull at every stroke, but the swarming foe were apparently getting the upper hand, when suddenly the quick report of another revolver was heard sounding from the underbrush behind the torture post.

Another Indian sank writhing to the earth, and five more shots followed in rapid succession with equally fatal effect.

Meanwhile Seth had managed to spring behind an adjacent boulder to protect himself while he reloaded his weapons from his cartridge

belt, which had not been taken from him when captured, and then he commenced firing away for dear life.

Every shot told home, but the cautious savages formed themselves into separate parties, and moved to the right and left, endeavoring to surround Seth, and attack him front and rear.

Meanwhile the storm continued raging with unabated fury.

It seemed as if the flood gates of Heaven were opened, and the lightning and thunder blazed and roared with terrible effect.

During an interval, in which he had ceased firing to load, Seth again felt something tugging at his leggings, and stooping down to discover what it was, he found Death and Danger crouching at his feet.

"So, boy," said the old man, affectionately patting the animal's head, notwithstanding his own danger, "yer are safe, and have come to help me!"

The dog seemed to comprehend his master's words, for he returned the caress by licking his hand, and then lay down as Seth resumed firing.

During the momentary pause, the Indians had managed to reach the trapper's safeguard.

A number of them began storming it in front, and Seth was blazing away, when he heard the deadly war whoop ringing behind him.

Turning at the sound, he saw that he was completely hemmed in, front and rear.

"Ha!" shouted he, drawing a long breath, "yer think you've got me, but ye hain't—take that!"

As he roared the words the old trapper discharged his last bullet, and clubbed his piece to make a final struggle for life.

The Indians poured over the boulder, and leaped upon Seth from behind, and as they thronged around the mysterious voice was again heard.

"You have not heeded my warning!" it shrieked, in blood curdling accents. "Behold, I come—I am the Spirit of the Flames!"

As the sound ceased, Mantego leaped forward, brandishing his blazing torches over his head.

"I defy you!" shouted he.

A blinding flash of lightning, accompanied by a clap of thunder, ensued, followed by dense darkness.

The next instant a tall woman appeared with the ball of fire in her hands.

As the medicine man beheld her he cowered back with a cry of fear, and the Indians quickly followed his example.

The woman reared the blazing globe aloft.

The bright light seemed to cover her form with a supernatural glow, as, tossing the ball directly from her, it fell upon a portion of the rock.

A fierce explosion followed as a column of flame shot up to a height of fully fifty feet, illuminating the Black Hills and the Indian camp with a ghastly glare.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DEATH STRUGGLE.

As the vivid shaft of flame reared aloft, shedding a blinding light upon the surrounding scenery, the apparition of the spirit of the flames seemed luminous with an effulgent glory.

For an instant the whole air seemed on fire.

A burning sense of suffocation appeared to seize those nearest to the blazing pyre, and several of the Indians staggered unsteadily to and fro as they gasped for breath, and catching frantically at their throats or breasts, and then toppling over, fell into a molten creek of flame that poured down the mountain side, increased to a torrent by the pouring rain.

The others, at a warning cry from Mantego, fell hastily on their faces, and the sudden return of the air, occasioned by the explosion, came with such relentless force as almost to strangle them where they lay.

Old Seth was standing at the time behind the boulders, with his rifle clubbed for defense, but suddenly, as if impelled by an unseen

power, his dog seized him by the leg and hurled him to the earth, where he lay gasping for breath.

Meanwhile, the flames spread in every direction. It caught the light materials of the wigwams, causing them to burst into a burning mass. The squaws and children rushed shrieking from the tents, and many of them fell to the earth in the last agonies of death.

For a moment Seth felt as if his last hour had come, but as the fierce elemental strife subsided, the falling rain seemed to restore him, and he felt his breath returning.

At the same moment he felt Death and Danger licking his face, as a hand was laid upon his arm.

"Come," whispered a voice in his ear, "we must be going; we have no time to lose!"

Arising to his feet at the sound, he grasped the extended hand and felt himself led hastily away.

For several minutes he hastened on, and then turning, he saw Mrs. Halliday at his side.

"Great Jonah!" shouted he, "is it you?"

"Yes," replied the woman. "By the aid of God I have saved you; but come on. Clover is close beside us."

Again they resumed their journey down the mountain, aided by the light of the burning stream.

Then Seth regained his scattered senses.

"We are going wrong," said he, hastily; "the red devils will miss us in a moment and follow in hot pursuit."

As if to testify to the truth of his statement, the shouts of the Pawnees were heard behind them.

Death and Danger uttered a low howl.

The dog had not been idle during Seth's frantic struggle with his fiendish antagonists.

His jaws were dripping with the life-blood of the Indians he had slain.

"Shut up!" hissed Seth, as he gave the dog a kick with his moccasined foot.

The animal made no reply, but looked reproachfully up into his master's face.

"I mean ye no harm, boy," whispered Seth, stooping down and patting Death and Danger's head, "but you must keep quiet!"

"So must you," said Mrs. Halliday, excitedly; "come, do you not hear them?"

"Yes," replied the trapper, seizing her by the hand and drawing her into the underbrush at the side of the path.

They had scarcely concealed themselves, when the sound of the pursuers' feet were heard rushing by, and, as soon as they had passed, Seth heard Clover saying:

"Thank God, uncle, that you are safe!"

"I ain't quite sure of that, Rosebud," said he. "We are in considerable of a pickle as it is; but I mean to circumnavigate the red devils or bust! I do, by Jonah!"

"But where shall we go?" whispered the half-crazed woman, whose overtaxed strength by this time was beginning to fail.

"Never you mind, old gal," replied Seth; "leave that ter Old Cata-mount; he's as sharp as a weasel and as knowin' as a bevar; but as you remarked just now, we've no time to lose!"

Then whispering a few words, he led the way across the path just taken by the Indians.

Entering the underbrush again he passed hastily on, followed by his comrades, who walked in Indian file, treading cautiously in his footprints.

In this manner they proceeded on for nearly half an hour.

By this time they were nearing the foot of the mountains.

Here the underbrush became denser, and the tall cedars and pines grew so closely together, that the party was scarcely able to penetrate among them. But Seth pulled aside the cat-briers and creeping vines stoutly with his hands, affording a safe passage for Clover and her mother, and as they passed on he let go the tangled mass, which rebounded back readily to its original position, completely covering their tracks.

By this time the thunderstorm seemed to have expended its strength and the rain ceased. The dark clouds floated gradually away to the westward, and presently the stars began to glimmer in the sky, until finally the clouds drifted away altogether and the full moon appeared in the east, shining brightly and cheerfully down upon the fugitives.

"Humph!" ejaculated Seth, as he looked reproachfully up at the

planet. "I wish you'd doused yer glim a little longer, old gal, until we was safely housed. I'm some'ut dubersome about them cussed skunks what's lookin' for us. They allowed, howsomever, that they was goin' to roast me as you rose, and you didn't put in an appearance in time to permit of that putty operation, so I suppose I must thank ye for that."

Just then Death and Danger paused, and gave an apprehensive sniff.

"What's up, old boy?" asked Seth, noticing the dog, who had stopped suddenly and turned, with extended ears and flaming eyes, toward the path through which they had just come.

Presently he gave a low whine and trotted a couple of yards back, where he paused, sniffing the air.

"There's somethin' up, sure as fate!" said Seth, rather anxiously; "that thar dog's more'n human ev'ry time he scents danger; don't speak, boy, but look out—keep a sharp eye—soh!"

Both Clover and her mother bent anxiously forward, watching Death and Danger, as the old trapper uttered the words.

The place where all were standing was a small open space in the dense forest of some four or five yards in extent, and the moon shone clearly down upon the open plot.

Presently a pattering sound was heard in the distance, and as it drew nearer Seth held up his finger with a warning gesture.

"Hush!" whispered he, "don't speak or move for your lives; it is an Indian dog, and he's follerin' our trail!"

He had scarcely uttered the exclamation before the underbrush parted and a huge, wolfish-looking, half-famished dog burst into the circle. He uttered a fierce bay as he beheld the startled women, but his cry was cut short as Death and Danger sprang savagely for him.

But the Indian dog was much the larger of the two, and as Death made the attack he leaped nimbly aside and made a savage snap at his fore-shoulder.

The gleaming teeth struck the mark, but Death leaped aside and retaliated with a counter cut that brought the blood from the other's side.

A howl of pain followed, and the bite was viciously returned.

At it they went in savage determination.

They bit and snapped, growled and snarled, turning and twisting, leaping eagerly from side to side, with mad glaring eyes and gleaming fangs.

The fight was ferocious and furious, but at first the Indian dog seemed the quicker of the two, as he seized Death and Danger with a telling hold on the left shoulder.

Death roared with anger as he snapped savagely at the assailant and endeavored to tear him off, but the brute hung stoutly to his hold.

The animals fought stoutly across and around the circle, but Death never uttered a cry, although his movements plainly denoted that he was suffering excruciating pain.

But presently things seemed to change as Death shook himself free and seized firmly hold of his antagonist's ear, chewing and lacerating it in a hideous manner.

But the Indian breed was clean game, for with a quick lurch it tore its lacerated ear from the fangs of Death and set its teeth stoutly in the latter's throat.

This hold lasted for several minutes, while Death writhed and squirmed, endeavoring to free himself from the tenacious grip, and then both fell and rolled stoutly over each other, each struggling vigorously for the mastery.

But presently Death tore himself loose in turn and gripped the other under the ear.

The blood spurted like a fountain, almost strangling the assailant, who held stoutly on, while the other vainly endeavored to shake himself free.

But Death, watching his chances, released his grip. The Indian dog made a fierce grasp for his throat, but Death leaped back and then forward, fastening his blood-stained fangs in the other's shoulder just under the fore leg.

The Indian dog squirmed and uttered a howl of pain, but Death held firmly on.

"How's that for high?" roared Seth, clapping his hands to encourage his dog.

But the exclamation had scarcely left his lips when the sound of approaching feet was heard hastening through the bushes.

"Jonah!" hissed Seth, "I forgot the Ingins. Come!" Raising his rifle, he brought it down with a thud directly upon the head of the Indian dog.

The bones of the dog's skull crunched beneath the blow as it fell dead upon the grass.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GRAPEVINE BRIDGE.

"COME," whispered Seth, as he tore vigorously away at his dog, who still held stoutly on to its dead antagonist, "we must get out of this all-fired quick or we'll all be snapped up surer than Jonah! Let go, ye brute, or I'll brain ye!"

The dog let go his hold at the command, and seizing Mrs. Halliday and Clover by the hands, Seth pulled them into the underbrush. They had scarcely disappeared before Waucanta leaped into the clearing, followed by his braves.

The next instant a shout announced that they had discovered the dead dog.

Meanwhile Seth was rushing swiftly on.

Ten minutes elapsed, and then he came to a ravine which was some four yards wide.

On the opposite side the rock rose straight up to the height of fully six hundred feet, while directly down was a hollow of double the extent.

Telling Mrs. Halliday to remain quiet, the old trapper uncurled a cord from his waist and whirled it hastily across the ravine.

The next moment he hauled in the slack, to which was attached a stout narrow bridge formed of wild grapevine.

Attaching this securely to a stump, he led the two women hastily across to a narrow ledge on the rock upon the opposite side. They were closely followed by Death and Danger. Then loosening another piece of grapevine, he allowed it to swing across the ravine and recrossed the fragile bridge.

As soon as he had done so, he slipped the bridge from the fastening and allowed it to return to its original position, where it hung like a natural grapevine against the rock.

Then seizing the grapevine swing he leaped across the ravine and joined his companions upon the narrow ledge.

Moving a little to the right, he led Mrs. Halliday and Clover behind a boulder and entered a low, narrow orifice in the rock, carefully drawing the boulder closely to behind him.

Seth and his party had scarcely disappeared when the White Serpent appeared on the opposite bank, accompanied by his braves.

Mantego, the medicine man, was with them.

As they reached the ravine the moon shone calmly down into the depths and illuminated the rocks on the opposite side, but not a sign of the fugitives was to be seen.

"Curses!" shouted the boy chief, fairly foaming with rage. "He has escaped us. The Catamount is not here. Search every inch of ground; he cannot be far away!"

Several scouting parties started in various directions to obey the order, as Mantego went up to Waucanta and said something in a low tone.

"What is that?" demanded the boy chief.

"It will be useless to search," was the reply; "he has crossed safely to the other side."

"How do you know this?"

"Manitou tells me," said the medicine.

"How has he crossed?"

"That has not been told me yet," replied the medicine; "we must wait for the day and search."

The young chief stamped his feet with rage, while the foam fairly rolled from between his set teeth.

Let us follow Seth and his companions.

The passage into which they had penetrated grew higher and wider as they proceeded; but it was so intensely dark that Seth was forced to compel Clover and her mother to join hands and grasp the skirt of his hunting-jacket as they followed.

In this manner they proceeded on until finally the old hunter paused.

"I think we are safe as beavers, now," said he, reassuringly; "the old serpent himself couldn't find us in this hole, you see, old gal," continued he, addressing himself more especially to Mrs. Halliday. "I discovered this cubbyhole one day while I was chasin a panther who sought refuge in this very spot. I was on this side, and I see him prowlin' along that ledge just outside from the top of the cliff. I gave him one for luck, but although I hit the varmint he managed to get ter shelter, and noticin' a narrer path that declined down the rocks, I came down in search of him. I traced him by his blood into the mouth of this cavern. But when I got in I found that the durn thing, although desperately wounded, meant fight. I s'pected that the painter'd be dead from the big trail of blood he'd left behind, but I hadn't got half so fur in as we are now, afore I heard a low, savage snarl and growl, and then the brute's claws tackled my legs, as he set his sharp teeth 'mazin' deep in the fat of my thigh. I don't know who yowled the loudest jist then, him or me, for I knew it meant death for one of us, so I just yanked out my old bowie, and watchin' a fair chance carved out his inards with the blade. The cuss rolled over like a log, but he'd got such a stout holt onter my thigh, that I had ter rip out a goodish chunk of meat afore I got free.

"Well, arter I'd braced up a bit, and got my wind, I did up the wound, and fell to lookin' 'round ter see what sort of a trap I'd stumbled inter. I didn't like it pretty well in the dark arter the tough tussle I'd had with the painter, so I went outside, and ascendin' the bluff procured a few dry pine knots to use as torches, and then come back again. I found the painter lyin' dead, and a ripper he was, to be sure. You've slept on his skin many a time in the old cabin, and so have you, Clover."

"Yes," murmured the child, clapping her hands as she listened with deep interest to the story. "Well?"

"Wall," continued Seth, "I rummaged round a bit, and found myself in this passage, which branches off just beyond in two directions, the one leading into several subterranean caverns. The other curves round and round like a spiral staircase to the top of the rock.

"Wall, I thought it 'ud be a fast-rate place to hide my traps and skins in now and then, especially ef ther cussed redskins hadn't ever sot foot in it, which I couldn't discover no manner of trace of; so I jest went to work and found that grapevine swing and bridge that served us so fortunately to-night; and often since, I've been here and passed the night when away from ther old log cabin.

"I've got a lot of pine knots, skins and furs, and sich like, not to speak of some dried provender, and deer flesh, laid away for a rainy day, and as this has been a rainy night, I don't know but what they'll turn up solid just now."

"But don't you fear that the Indians will track us to the other side, uncle," asked Clover, anxiously, "and find that we've crossed, and follow?"

"That's a ruther leadin' question, little gal, as they say in the courts, but I don't believe the Indians know that you two were here at all; it's me that they was lookin' fur, and had it not been for ther special interposition of Providence and that are Spirit of the Flames, I'd been a dead Catamount as sure as that painter is that I was just speakin' about; and likely flayed alive inter ther bargain."

Clover burst into a merry, childish laugh.

"Why, what do you mean by interposition of Providence, uncle?" asked she.

"Why, the appearance of that thar Fire Woman," replied the trapper, seriously, "what sot everything on fire and nearly burnt up the whole caboodle of us. It was a perfect miracle!"

"Why, there wasn't nothing providential or miraculous about that," said Clover, laughing more merrily than ever. "That Fire Woman was only mother, and she produced the whole thing in the simplest manner."

"Stuff!" aspirated Seth, who had been walking on while talking; "tell that to the fresh fish at Fort Laramie; yer can't make an old Catamount like me swaller it, by Jonah!"

And as he uttered the words he paused, and striking a light, applied it to a pine knot, which he produced from an orifice in the rock.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CAVERN OF LEAD.

As the blaze of the torch flashed up with a ruddy light, a most wonderful spectacle struck the eyes of the two astonished women.

They found themselves standing in a vast cavern of nearly circular shape, and probably six or eight hundred feet in circumference. The roof, sides and tessellated columns that rose in the center like the pillars of a cathedral, shone and scintillated in the flaming torchlight like molten silver, and so startling and brilliant was the effect that it fairly dazzled their eyes and took away their breath.

"Mercy sakes alive, Seth!" gasped Mrs. Halliday, for once startled from her usual lethargy, "what on earth is it? Is it silver?"

"Not so bad a guess, old gal," said he, smiling at the surprise of both. "But you're off track—it looks 'mazin' like silver, but it's only lead—but it'll be a snug fortune for some one, some of these fine days, and I reckon I know who."

The old man placed his hand affectionately upon Clover's head as he spoke.

"Findin's keepin', I believe, and this is the puttiest find I ever see."

The half-crazed woman made no reply, as she stood gazing bewilderedly around.

"Why, uncle, you don't mean to lay claim to all this, do you?" asked Clover.

"Yes, indeedy, I do, little one," replied he; "wasn't I the fust one to lay livin' eyes onter it, as fur as I can see, and I mean to hold on like grim death! But I'm getting prime hungry," continued he; "that mouthful of stew that I was swallerin' when I heard them red varmints on the roof, didn't holt worth a cent; so I propose to strike a fire and have somethin' to eat. Besides that I want some fresh bullets, for I'm precious nigh outen ammunition. It's lucky I've got a little powder stored here in a dry hole in the rock, and by clippin' off some of this lead and meltin' it, I can cast all the bullets I want."

As he spoke, Seth went to one side of the cavern, and presently returned bearing an armful of wood, which he placed in the center and ignited with his torch.

For a few seconds it spluttered and sizzled sluggishly, casting forth small puffs of smoke, until finally it burst into a ruddy flame and burnt cheerily away.

Seth then brought forward a number of robes and furs, which he cast beside the fire, bidding the women to sit down and dry themselves.

This they readily did, and also partook without much persuasion of a horn each of commissary whisky, which Seth produced from some secret repository. Then Seth produced an iron pot, filling it from a pure spring that formed in a natural fountain in the rock and flowed in a small stream through the cavern. Into the water he tossed a handful or two of coffee, and presently the rich aroma of Old Government Java penetrated the cavern with an appetizing odor.

"I can't give ye much of a spread, gals," said the trapper, as he removed the steaming coffee from the fire and sat it before them, with a supply of sugar and a couple of tin cups, "but ter such as I have ye're heartily welcome."

He then produced some dried venison and smoked salmon, with some hard bread, which, with the coffee, furnished a meal to which the half-famished eaters did ample justice.

"Why, uncle," said Clover, "this is quite a treat, and quite equals some of those fairy tales you used to tell me on winter nights."

"Yes, you little rat," said the old man with a grim smile, "but it ain't half as big a ghost story as that you was tryin' to gul yer old uncle with a half an hour since, about the Spirit of the Flames bein' yer mother."

"That was Gospel truth, uncle," replied the child, "honest Injun!"

"Thar you go," snorted the trapper. "Who ever heard of an honest Injun in all his born days?"

"But it's true, nevertheless, Seth," replied Mrs. Halliday, very determinedly. "Clover speaks the truth!"

"Wagh!" retorted the trapper, doubtfully, "yer can't fool yer uncle."

"But I say it is," reiterated Mrs. Halliday, stoutly. "When you went on to the roof to-night I didn't pay much attention to your absence at first until I heard the sounds of a struggle, when I knew at once that the Indians were around. For a time both Clover and

myself were terribly frightened, and waited anxiously for your return, but as you did not come I scarcely knew what to do, until finally Death and Danger came to the door, and, scratching for admission, pulled us by the skirts, denoting that he wanted us to go with him. As his head was torn and bleeding, I feared that you were captured or wounded, perhaps dead, and as some incomprehensible power impelled me to follow, I took down your revolvers and quitted the cabin, accompanied by Clover."

The dog, who seemed to be paying the greatest attention to everything that Mrs. Halliday said, here approached and poked his cold nose into her lap, and caressing his blood-stained head with her hand, she continued her recital.

"Poor fellow," said she, partially addressing the dog, "it was you indeed who led us to the Indian camp where your poor master was bound to the torture stake, awaiting a cruel and lingering death. It is impossible, sir, for you to imagine," she said in continuation, as she turned toward Seth, "how sadly startled I was at the terrible sight. What could I, a poor old woman, do against such fearful odds? But some unseen power impelled me to attempt your rescue, and I determined to do so. Besides, Clover was so anxious to rush to your side that I feared she would and spoil all. I had frequently heard of the superstitious nature of the savages, and determined to attempt your rescue by playing upon their credulity. A very simple plan presented itself, upon which I acted at once. It was just before the storm burst, if you remember, that they commenced their hideous tortures."

"By gumps, yer right, gal," said Seth, scratching the end of his injured nose, where the blood had dried in a gout upon the top of his grizzly mustache, "as this sliced smeller can testerfy to a dot."

"Well, at that time," continued Mrs. Halliday, "I determined to make the attempt, and accordingly sent Clover to your side to cut your bonds, hand the revolver, and tell you to be ready to attempt to escape when the sound of a hoot owl was heard, trusting that if I could thoroughly startle and dismay the Indians, that we might all get safely away during the excitement that followed. Well, you know that you once told me that there was an oil spring just above the spot where the Indian camp is situated, don't you?"

"Yes," answered Seth, scratching his head, reflectively.

"Well, that's just where I started for," said Mrs. Halliday, "and when I reached it I rolled up a large bundle of moss and pitch pine knots compactly together, setting it on fire, and starting it swiftly down the mountain side."

"Um—um!" said Seth, nodding his head, "and the cussed varmints thought it was the Spirit of Fire."

"Exactly, and so I proclaimed it," continued Mrs. Halliday, "when I replied that it was simply an agent, but if they did not release you at once that the Spirit of Flame would come and destroy them."

"And, by Jonah, it did, too!"

"Why, it was only me, you thickhead!"

"What!" gasped Seth, "you the woman all on fire that blowed us all up? Gas!"

"Certainly, it was just gas," said Mrs. Halliday, resolutely; "when I saw that they were unwilling to give you up I gave the signal, and you attempted to escape. Then followed the fight, and, rushing to the flaming fire ball, I lifted it boldly up, announcing myself as the Spirit of the Flames, cast it from me on the rock!"

"Wall!"

"It must have struck one of the veins through which the petroleum gas escapes and created the explosion that followed."

"By Jonah, yer right—what a head piece yer have got, old gal—it's a consarned pity that it didn't blow every buck, sage, medicine, squaw, and pappoose to—! But who in blazes fired them six shots that did such all fired good service durin' the scrimmage while I was reloadin' behind the bowlder?"

"Me, uncle," replied Clover, proudly, "and didn't I shoot 'em pretty?"

"By Jonah! ye did that, little gal, yer are chain lightnin' on the shute; thar ain't a shot in the country that can lay alongside of yer—yer do everlastin' credit ter yer old uncle for teachin' yer ter shute—yer do, by Jonah!"

Just then Death and Danger leaped suddenly from Mrs. Halliday's lap with a savage bay, and stood looking toward one end of the cabin, with bristling back and wild blood-shot eyes.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SILVER SERPENT AGAIN.

As the dog pricked up his back and stood looking curiously toward the distant portion of the cavern, he commenced howling and whining in the most piteous manner.

"Why, what on earth ails the critter?" said old Seth, partially to himself, as he scratched his head, considering; "he seems desperate afraid, he does, and that's somethin' I never see him do afore. What is it, boy? Go for it like a good fellow. Never say funk, it's a nasty, mean word."

The dog turned and licked the caressing hand laid upon his back by the old hunter, but made no attempt to obey the order, as he crouched shivering and shaking at his master's feet as if he were seized with the ague.

Both Clover and her mother also seemed considerably surprised and startled by the dog's movements.

"What is it, uncle?" whispered Clover, anxiously. "Is there danger ahead?"

"Are the Indians coming?" came the question from Mrs. Halliday, in equally frightened accents, as her face turned as white as a ghost.

"I'm jiggered if I know," replied Seth. "The critter is despret struck and no mistake. Have you got any bullets left, Clover?"

"Yes," came the quick reply.

"Well, give me some then," said the hunter, "and load yer own revolvers as quick as possible. I misdoubt me but there is danger ahead, but in what form I can't make out by no manner of means."

Clover handed him the bullets and followed his example by loading immediately.

Then both she and Seth stood waiting anxiously with their fingers firmly pressed on the triggers of their revolvers.

Presently Death and Danger uttered another frantic howl, and sprang forward like an arrow from a bow.

In another instant he disappeared in the gloom of the cavern.

He had been absent possibly ten minutes or less, but the brief interval seemed an eternity to the anxious watchers, when the sounds of a fierce struggle floated toward them from the dim obscurities of the cavern.

"He's snapped up somethin'," said Seth, excitedly addressing the two women. "I must go and see what it is."

"For God's sake," moaned Mrs. Halliday, grasping the hunter's arm as he started to go. "For God's sake don't leave us, Seth. I shall go mad if I'm left alone after all that I've undergone to-night."

Seth turned and stamped his foot impatiently.

"Gol darn it, gal!" hissed he, "can't ye hear that, the old dog's gettin' blazes all alone to hisself. Maybe he's cotched another painter and is gettin' the wust of it. It 'ud never do ter let him go under without standin' ter his back. Stop whar ye are, gals, and don't budge an inch, and I'll be back in the twinklin' of a ram's tail."

And tearing himself loose from the restraining grasp, Seth darted away like a racer into the darkness, whence the sound of the struggle still fiercely emanated.

"I wonder what it can be?" whispered Clover, trembling perceptibly as she clung close to her mother, and strained her eyes as if striving to pierce the inextricable gloom.

"I'm sure I can't imagine, my love," replied Mrs. Halliday. "God alone knows, let us appeal to Him for aid, for something tells me that we are in great danger."

Still the sounds of the struggle continued as the two women fell devoutly upon their knees, and appealed to Heaven for aid.

They could hear a rough, tussling sound as if some heavy body were beating the sides and flooring of the cavern with a flail.

Now and then a fierce bay came from the throat of the bulldog, and then the voice of Seth was heard encouraging him to new efforts.

But after a time the sounds ceased, and then Death and Danger came tearing toward them like a whipped cur, and crouched trembling and panting at their side.

The women regarded him with looks of terror.

What could it all mean?

Presently Seth, too, appeared.

He came running toward them.

"I can't make out what in thunder it all means," said he, as he reached their side. "It's so all-fired dark in thar that I can't see my nose afore my face; but it 'taint no painter—of that I'm certain sure."

"What is it, old boy?" continued he, as he noticed the cowering dog, and stooped down to pat his head; "at 'em again, don't funk now, old chap."

But the animal made no attempt to move as he crouched there, trembling in every limb.

"I'm dead ashamed of yer!" gasped the old hunter, with a motion of disgust; but as he uttered the words, Clover grasped his arm, and pointed excitedly toward the end of the cavern.

Seth turned his eyes in the indicated direction, and a startling apparition met his gaze.

Crawling toward them from the darkness came a long, gliding body, that glittered and shimmered in the firelight like molten silver.

Seth uttered a shout of surprise, intermingled with dismay.

The object was a silver serpent fully thirty feet in length, which came crawling leisurely toward them.

The shining scales scintillated and glittered in the firelight, and the bead-like eyes shone and twinkled like balls of living fire.

As Clover beheld the terrible object she shrieked aloud, and covered her eyes with her hands to shut out the hideous sight.

"Great Jonah!" gasped Seth. "This beats the old serpent himself! No wonder the dog wouldn't face it!"

Meanwhile, the serpent had paused half way, where it elevated nearly half its length from the floor, and commenced waving its head and neck slowly to and fro, with a swaying, sinuous motion as it darted forth its forked tongue in an angry and threatening manner.

"By Jinks!" gasped Seth, setting his teeth firmly together as he brought his revolver to bear upon the undulating head, "I'll try yer mettle, be ye reptile or devil!"

But before he could fire, Mrs. Halliday seized his arm with a tenacious grip.

"For mercy's sake, Seth!" shouted she, desperately, "don't fire as you value your life! Something tells me that my boy's life is centered in his!"

"Nonsense!" retorted Seth, striving to tear away the retarding grasp, as he looked toward the woman.

He saw that her eyes were again blazing with the light of insanity.

"Let go your hand!" shouted the old hunter, tearing himself free.

"Don't be a fool, old gal, if ye have gone clean daft!"

As he pushed her vigorously away in his impetuosity, Mrs. Halliday fell to the floor, but the next moment she sprang to her feet and waving her hands aloft, she pointed sternly to the roof of the cavern.

"I tell you," shouted she, "that when the Jews were traveling through the wilderness of Sinai, and were sore afflicted with a shower of living serpents from Heaven because of their transgressions of the law, that Moses lifted up a brazen serpent that all who looked upon it might be cured—why shall not a silver serpent be sent to me in my affliction to bear me news of my lost son?"

"I don't know nothin' 'bout that, old gal," said Seth, dubiously, as he scratched his head, "for I ain't much versed on scripture—but if he did it was nigh on to five thousand years ago, and they ain't doin' any such chicken fixin's in ther present century by a long chalk! So here goes for a shot at old silver snoot."

As he spoke he blazed away.

Six rapid shots followed those discharged by Seth. They were fired by the hand of Clover.

But although every shot was aimed with deadly precisicn, and each hit the mark, the bullets seemed to glance off the shining scales of the silver serpent as if he was gifted with a charmed existence, and the reptile remained where he was, with his body swayin' steadily to and fro as if utterly regardless of the leaden fusillade.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FIERCE CONFLICT.

"GOL durn yer ugly pieter!" roared old Seth, as he noticed the unmoved demeanor of the silver serpent, "maybe yer think lead can't harm yer tough hide, because yer were brought up in a lead mine; but I'll try yer mettle again, hit or miss—hev yer got any more bullets, Clover?"

"Nary a one, uncle."

"Tarnation!"

Seth fairly foamed at the mouth as he hissed the words, and turning he seized old thunder and brought the butt savagely down upon the floor, drawing his hand to his bullet pouch in search of a bullet.

But it was utterly empty, not a leaden messenger remained.

The old man uttered a savage roar of baffled rage.

"Curse the infernal luck," shouted he. "I'd give a year of life to give yer one more shot!"

The next instant he burst into a roar of laughter that re-echoed with startling distinctness through the cave.

Clover looked at him in dismay; she thought that he too was bereft of his senses and gone raving mad.

It was a startling and terrible thought to the child to be there at midnight surrounded by two maniacs, with death staring her in the face from the serpent intruder.

But the next moment she saw that the old man was as calm as ever and perfectly possessed of his senses.

The laugh had been occasioned by a happy thought that presented itself to Seth.

He hastily brought his powder horn over the palm of his horny hand, and pouring out a heavy charge of powder, inserted it in the barrel of his rifle.

Then ramming home a wad, he darted to the side of the cavern, and cutting off a piece of the lead, whittled it into the shape of a slug, and rammed that home in turn.

Then bringing the weapon across his breast, he placed a cap upon the nipple, and taking aim discharged it point blank at the silver serpent.

Crack!

The slug flew direct for the mark, and struck the reptile full in the center of the forehead between the eyes.

But as the sound of the thud accompanying the blow was heard, the leaden messenger rebounded to the floor, and the silver serpent shook his head angrily as it gave vent to a defiant hiss.

"Cuss ye, ye infernal varmint!" roared Seth, half wild at the utter

failnre of his attempt. "I believe ye are case-hardened and chain fastened; but I'll try another gait, and if I don't fetch ye this time I'll eat my hat!"

He darted forward as he spoke and aimed a telling blow at the serpent's neck, swinging the butt of his rifle swiftly around his head to give redoubled impetus to the stroke.

But as he brought down the weapon with terrible effect the serpent ducked down its head, and missing his aim, the force of the blow utterly carried the old man off his feet, and taking a tumble he turned heels over head upon the cavern floor.

For a second Seth lay where he had fallen half stunned from the effect of the concussion, but the next instant he was on his feet again, and dropping his rifle he seized his bowie knife instead.

With a swift spring the hunter darted toward the silver serpent where it had coiled itself snugly up upon the floor, with his head slightly elevated and moving back and forth, as its forked tongue shot out and in, while it hissed threateningly at the assailant.

But Seth's mad was now thoroughly up.

He would not have feared the very devil in such a condition, and darting forth his left hand he caught the serpent's neck just back of the head with a vise-like, tenacious grasp.

The huge reptile darted up its neck with a lurch that nearly dislocated the old trapper's wrist, but sticking stoutly to his hold, Seth made a fierce cut at the uncurling coils with his keen-edged blade.

The weapon glanced as if it had clashed against a kindred steel.

"Great Jonah!" gasped Seth, as the perspiration formed in great beads down his brow and cheeks, "the cuss is hard as flint!"

But scarcely had the words left his lips before the serpent made another desperate lurch, and darting out its writhing form to its full length tossed Seth over and over upon the floor.

But the old man held stoutly on, cutting desperately away with his knife, vainly endeavoring to find some vulnerable spot to strike at and deal a death blow amidst the undulating and rustling scales.

Meanwhile, Clover and her mother stood spellbound and dismayed spectators of the startling conflict.

For a brief interval neither seemed able to muster up sufficient courage to interfere in behalf of Seth, but finally, as Clover recovered somewhat, she turned toward her mother to ask her help, but as she did so she recognized that the appeal would be useless.

Poor Mrs. Halliday still remained upon her knees where she had again fallen after her useless, maddened appeal to Seth, with her trembling hands clasped closely over her bosom, but in the wide distended eyes that glared wildly at the writhing combatants Clover recognized alone the light of utter madness and imbecility.

"Poor mother," moaned the wretched girl, "I can expect no help from you."

And then, crawling to the side of the dog, she vainly strove to get him to go to the aid of his master.

But for once Death and Danger appeared to have lost his pluck, and all Clover's efforts seemed futile to make him budge an inch.

Meanwhile the desperate and deadly conflict between Seth and the silver serpent continued on with increased intensity.

They fought savagely from side to side.

Now Seth was on top struggling tenaciously for the mastery.

And then he was down upon the cavern floor, inclosed in the twining and crushing folds of the serpent's coils.

The old hunter's breath was beginning to fail him.

It came and went in low, swift gasps from his crushed bosom. Already his eyes were beginning to bulge from their sockets with a hideous glare, as the twining coils crept closer and closer around his throat; he felt with dismay that it was all up with him, he realized

that death must come speedily if the terrible strain upon his throat lasted much longer, and was beginning to resign himself to his fate, when suddenly a shrill, piercing whistle rang through the cavern, and he felt the coils that bound him gradually loosening.

CHAPTER XVII.

A NIGHT ATTACK.

As the strange sound reached his ears and the serpent's coils withdrew, Seth felt greatly relieved, but for a few moments he could scarcely move.

But as soon as he was able he looked up and saw the silver serpent crawling swiftly away in the distance.

It is extremely doubtful that Seth, bold as he was, would have followed just then, even had he been in a condition to do so, but bruised and shaken by the recent desperate struggle, he simply sat upon his haunches in a dazed condition and watched the reptile disappear in the darkness.

"I'm blamed if I can make out what in blazes that whistle meant," muttered he, considering to himself, "but whatsoever it was, it saved my life, and that'll satisfy me for the present. Dog my cats if I ever was in such an extremity in all my born days—or nights either for that matter!" Then shaking himself together he got up and went over to Clover and Mrs. Halliday.

"It beats the dickens," said he, "what strange events have happened to-night; blame me if I can make out if I'm asleep or awake."

Clover made no reply, but pressed the old man's hand tenderly, as she pointed earnestly at her mother.

Seth looked considerably at the crazed woman, and tapped his head.

"Got 'em again and wuss than ever," said he; "poor gal, I wonder if she'll ever get clean over it? Well, I don't wonder; this night's work is enough to turn the brain of a cast-iron saint."

Then, turning away, he went to the secret receptacle and returned with the flask.

Pouring some of the whisky into a tin cup, he procured some leaves and putting them into it, half filled it with boiling water.

After it had cooled sufficiently, he approached Mrs. Halliday and said:

"Here, gal, take some of this; it will warm ye up."

The woman made no reply as she looked up dazedly into his face, and then, taking the cup, drained it to the dregs.

It took effect immediately, for Mrs. Halliday sank gently back upon the couch and fell into a calm slumber.

"Now, Clover," said Seth, "you better go to sleep, too, for we must be movin' bright and early in the morning."

"Are you going home, uncle?" asked the child; "I don't feel a bit sleepy."

"Nary a time, Rosebud," replied Seth, grimly; "it wouldn't be healthy after what has occurred to-night. The red devils have drawn a bead on us, and they'd fetch us dead sure the next time. I'm goin' ter take yer ter Laramie for awhile until things blows over and the coast is clear."

"But I don't want to leave you, uncle," replied the child, nestling close up to him.

"Never fear about that, little one," said he, patting her shining hair gently, "the old man won't be fur away—there, lay down and take a

snooze while I cast some bullets, for we mustn't be caught outen of ammunition again in a hurry!"

Clover obeyed the trapper, and snuggled herself closely beside her mother.

The child, notwithstanding her assertion that she was not sleepy, was excessively fatigued, and as she watched the old man moving around her eyes closed, and presently she was as sound asleep as her mother.

Meanwhile, Seth got his bullet mold, and placing an iron ladle over the fire, which he had replenished with fresh fuel, he filled it with pieces of lead hewn from the sides of the cavern.

When the contents were sufficiently melted to admit of use, Seth commenced casting his bullets, dropping them into a pot of water that he had procured for that purpose.

This operation took the hunter some time, and nearly three-quarters of an hour elapsed before he had procured a sufficient quantity to suit his purpose.

But having finished, he consigned the bullets to his pouch, and reloading old thunder and the revolvers, he built up the fire and sat down to await the coming of daylight.

Although the hunter had no watch, he needed none to inform him of the lapse of time. He had been too long accustomed to the wild life of the plains to require a time-piece to tell him the hour of day or night; for his years' watch of the sun and stars had made him perfectly conversant with the flight of time and the tickings of the seconds, minutes, and hours as they flew rapidly away.

It is singular how wide-awake and perceptive these old hunters become in the far West, and Seth was a paragon of his kind and seldom caught napping, but strange to say, on this occasion he forgot himself and dozed off where he sat.

He must have gone pretty sound asleep, for he suddenly awoke with a lurch that nearly toppled him into the fire.

"Cuss my blamed carelessness," muttered he, sleepily, "I was nearly off—what's that?"

He was wide enough awake now.

The exclamation was occasioned by a low growl from his dog.

During Seth's nap Death and Danger had been lying asleep, snuggled up at his master's feet.

But as the trapper partially awakened with a start, the animal sprang erect with bristling back, and uttered the warning growl.

In a second Seth sprang to his feet, rifle in hand, and cast his eyes hastily around the cavern.

He could see that Clover and her mother were still calmly reposing upon their couch of skins, but what was that crawling slowly toward him through the darkness?

During his sleep the fire had burned down low, and the glimmering ashes barely served to dispel the gloom; but by the dim light he saw Death and Danger make a sudden spring, and then the sound of a fierce scuffle ensued.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE MINE.

It was a moment of deep interest to the old trapper, as he stood there with bated breath and listened to the sounds of the struggle that followed the bay and leap of his dog.

What could it all be?

Had the Silver Serpent returned to the charge?

If so, Seth, bold as he was, felt his blood curdle in his veins at the bare thought of another struggle with the terrible antagonist.

But even if this were the case, it would never do to stand idly by in the darkness; he must go to the aid of Death and Danger, whatsoever might be the result; so seizing up a fresh supply of fuel, he cast it hastily on the fire.

For a second the smoke curled slowly up in a cloud toward the roof of the cavern, and then, as the wood caught and burst into a bright blaze, Seth saw the cause of the sounds.

Prostrate on the floor lay the struggling form of a burly Indian, who was tugging stoutly at the neck of Death and Danger, the dog having fastened his gleaming fangs firmly in the savage's shoulder.

The two brutes were tussling fiercely away in the most determined manner, but it was extremely difficult for the moment to judge which was getting the best of the battle.

"Great Jonah!" hissed Seth, "how in thunder did he get in without my knowin' it? I wonder if there's any more of 'em in tow? Go it, old steamboat!" continued he, addressing the dog. "Shake him up lively and chaw the stuffin' outen him, for it won't do ter fire for fear of alarmin' his pals, if there's more on 'em about."

Death and Danger uttered a smothered growl, as if comprehending the encouraging words, and turned his bloodshot eyes knowingly at his master as he wagged the stump of his tail with canine satisfaction.

And then drawing suddenly back, he made a fresh dive for the savage's throat.

But the Indian, notwithstanding his apparent age, which must have been sixty-five, to say the least, was as supple and quick as a lizard, and taking advantage of the momentary cessation of hostilities on the part of the dog, leaped nimbly to his feet, and, whipping out his knife, made a furious lunge at the dog's heart.

But Death was not so easily caught, for, as the keen blade plowed a nasty gash down his breast, drawing a swarth of blood, the dog sprang quickly aside, and, leaping up, set his sharp molars in the Indian's throat, drawing forth a shriek of agony and a fountain of blood at one and the same instant.

"Well done, old boy!" shouted Seth, clapping his hands encouragingly. "Sock it to him lively, he don't deserve a show of mercy, and I'll leave it all to you. Yer don't require a hand of help, yer don't, by Jonah!"

Meanwhile, the ferocious animal was torturing and worrying the savage in a terrible and startling manner.

The redskin's tongue was lolling from his mouth, and his eyes started wildly from his head in mortal agony, as the death dew beaded his brow and temples.

The death rattle was commencing to gurgle in his throat, but in dire extremity as he was, he fought bravely on to the bitter end, vainly striving to beat off or release himself from the fierce grip of the tenacious dog.

Seth saw that the struggle was nearly over, and that all was up with the Indian, when suddenly he heard a sound that made him look to his own safety in turn.

Whiz!

He dodged as he heard the noise, and a whirling tomahawk flew whizzing by his ear and struck with a thud against the side of the cavern, burying itself half blade deep in the leaden lining.

"By gump! that was a 'mazin' close shave, but a miss is as good as a mile," said Seth, as he leaped aside and turned in the direction whence the deadly missile had come with such fearful velocity. As he did so he saw another Indian standing barely two yards away,

tugging stoutly at the thong of the tomahawk to dislodge it from its position.

"Here, none of that!" shouted Seth, as he drew his bowie knife and severed the deerskin strap with a quick cut; "two can play at that game, old copper belly!"

He sprang toward the Indian, knife in hand, as he uttered the words.

But the redskin saw his danger, and, turning tail, ran swiftly toward the darknees of the cavern.

Seth saw the motion, and with a savage oath turned and seized up old thunder, bringing it quickly to his shoulder and drawing a bead on the retreating savage.

Bang!

The bullet followed the sound almost simultaneously, but the Indian had lowered his body, and was running from side to side with a zig-zag motion that prevented its hitting the mark.

Seth realized that he had missed his aim, but drawing his revolver, he brought it to bear in turn, but before he could fire the Indian disappeared, and in his place appeared the towering form of the Silver Serpent, regarding the trapper with its glowing eyes and its writhing form ready for a spring.

Seth sprang aside just in time, for the next instant the serpent leaped by him like an arrow from a bow and disappeared in a hole in the rock, and as it did so Seth realized that his assailant had effected his escape.

"Gol darn yer ugly picter!" roared Seth, "why on airth didn't yer stay and give me a square show?"

But the next instant, realizing the peril of himself and the two sleeping women, in case the savages should return reinforced, he leaped to the side of Clover and her mother, shaking them hastily by the shoulders.

As he did so he saw that the dog had killed the Indian, and was shaking and mutilating the remains.

Clover opened her eyes sleepily.

"What is it, uncle?" inquired she, sitting up and rubbing her eyes.

"Get up," whispered Seth; "we haven't a minute ter spare, Rosebud, if we get outen this with whole skins. Come, move lively, or the whole caboodle of 'em will be down on us like chain lightnin'!"

But Mrs. Halliday was sleeping too soundly, owing to the effects of the sleeping potion, to be easily overheard, so, seizing her up like an infant in his arms, the old trapper led the way, followed by Clover.

As he hastened toward a passage branching off the main chamber, he called to his dog, who ceased worrying the dead Indian and followed immediately.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE INDIAN BURIAL AND THE DOG-FEAST.

NEARLY five hours have passed since we left Waucanto and Mantego standing on the verge of the ravine, after discovering the escape of Seth.

The reader will readily understand that neither the White Serpent nor the medicine man were aware that Seth was accompanied; had they been, they would doubtless have taken a different course from what they did, but as it was, after holding a brief consultation, they determined to return to camp and endeavor to put things to rights

before they proceeded to bury the murdered sachem with proper honors befitting his age and rank.

On reaching the devastated camp they found everything in confusion.

Nearly all the huts and wigwags had been destroyed by the explosion and the conflagration that ensued, and several braves and women had been killed outright, while many others were seriously wounded and burned by the blazing oil.

Thus it happened that nearly an hour elapsed before Mantego had finished dressing the wounded and preparing the dead for burial. But when the dead chiefs and squaws had been properly laid out, and the solemn death song ended, the burial party took up the dead and marched in solemn cortege to the adjacent burial ground.

On reaching the spot they found a deep pit, in which the dead were properly placed, with the exception of the white-haired chief, Wakesauka.

He was to be buried alone, and with proper honors befitting his rank and station.

At first he was laid respectfully to one side, and then his favorite steed was brought to the verge of the deep pit in which both himself and dead master were to be deposited.

After a number of mystic ceremonies had been performed one of the chiefs approached the horse and dealt it a death blow.

The poor animal uttered an almost human cry as it fell to the earth with the life blood pouring from its severed throat.

But as soon as life had fled stout ropes of buffalo hide were stretched beneath the belly of the dead steed, when it was lowered into the pit and propped up in a standing position.

Then the old chief's body was placed in a sitting position on his horse's back, with his bow and arrow in one hand and his scalping knife in the other.

In his hunting pouch was placed a good supply of parched corn and venison, with a flask of water slung over his shoulder. These provisions were to sustain him on his journey to join his spirit in the happy hunting grounds, while his weapons were to defend him from the attacks of unfriendly assailants, or procure him game while on the way.

An Indian dog was also slain to accompany him, and then, after another chant and a new series of incantations, the pit was filled in, completely hiding the old chief from view, amidst the cries and shrieks of the attendant members of the tribe.

When this portion of the ceremony was ended a large fire was built close at hand, around which the young braves and old men of the tribe gathered, and, perching themselves in a sitting position on their haunches, gazed with fixed eyes into the crackling flame.

Presently Mantego leaped into the ring, garbed in his mystic robes of office, and began singing, shouting and capering around the blaze in a weird and fantastic manner.

After these antics had been continued for some quarter of an hour or more, an Indian dog was hastily borne into the circle.

The poor animal seemed to comprehend its destined fate, for as soon as he witnessed the fire and the attendant Indians, he set up a hideous and unearthly howl, struggling desperately to release himself from those who held him.

But his efforts were useless.

Mantego leaped quickly toward him and grasped him firmly by the nape of the neck.

The animal set up another frantic howl and struggled violently to get free, as he bit and snapped viciously at his tormentor.

But the Indian priest held stoutly to his victim, and, muttering some incomprehensible jargon, hurled him ruthlessly upon his back, and,

plunging his keen knife blade into the upturned throat, literally ripped him open to the midriff, completely disemboweling and displaying his palpitating heart and other members, as the red blood spurted like a fountain in the face of the sanguinary executioner.

Then ripping out the pulsing heart with another quick stroke, he held it up, dripping with gore, as he also tore out the liver and cast them both on the flames.

The quivering members hissed and sputtered, shriveled and scorched until the nauseating odor of burning flesh was plainly distinguishable, when the medicine man tore them from the fire, and, carving them piecemeal, distributed the loathsome repast among the waiting chiefs, who greedily devoured the portions allotted to them.

This being done, the carcass of the dog was also divided into parts and distributed raw among the braves and ancients of the tribes, who placed them eagerly in their hunting pouches for future use.

This portion of the ceremony being ended, the medicine man again arose to his feet and resumed his fantastic antics and capers.

Gradually, as his motions grew swifter and more furious, one after another of the sitting Indians leaped to his feet in turn and joined him in the dance.

Round and round the circle they swept, gliding out and in among each other in mazy undulations that seemed to have no set measure or figure, but forming a dance of by no means unpleasing or ungraceful motion.

But gradually, as the dance continued, their leaps and springs became more violent and demonstrative. Their voices rang out shrill, sharp and guttural in savage tones, while they drew their knives, tomahawks or arrows, brandishing them menacingly around their foreheads.

Some of the younger members of the tribe gashed themselves hideously on their bare breasts, causing the blood to flow freely, uttering fierce shouts and yells, while their flashing eyes blazed with demoniac fury.

It was a scene of terrific intensity that might have gladdened the hearts of the fiends; and as the hideous saturnalia grew more fast and furious, the gray dawn appeared and the warm sun arose, looking down with blazing face upon the ghastly orgies.

CHAPTER XX.

THE OATH OF VENGEANCE.

As the sun arose higher, the medicine man stood still, and elevating his hands above his head, made a motion toward the Indians and waved his arms toward it.

In an instant the dance ceased, and each member of the group prostrated himself to earth in silent adoration.

For nearly ten minutes they remained in this position, and then at an exclamation from Mantego, they arose again.

"Braves of the Pawnee tribe," said the old man, as his voice trembled with emotion, "you have performed the last services for your dead chief, and you old men have sung his death song. He is riding his steed to the happy hunting grounds of his fathers, to join them in the retinue of the Great Spirit; but he is still sad at heart that his death is not avenged."

A wild shout of rage greeted the old man's speech, and the Indians flourished their weapons in a threatening and menacing manner.

"It is well," said the young chief, witnessing the movement with

a look of approbation; "the voice of my father, the white-haired chief, calls from the sky for vengeance! I can hear it ringing in my ears, and his glowing eyes burn into my very heart. The hand of the white hunter is stained with the blood of my father, and himself and his accursed race must suffer the penalty of his crime."

Again the voices of the chiefs arose in savage response to the address.

"They have lifted the hatchet from the spot where 'twas buried by Wakesauka years ago, and they must pay the penalty for the deed. Blood for blood—a life for a life—revenge for the death of my father!"

The Indians seemed fairly maddened by the stirring appeal as they gathered closely around the young chief.

"It is well!" shouted he, witnessing the movement with flashing eyes and heaving bosom; "it is war to the knife!"

"It is, it is!" shouted the braves, extending their scalping knives toward that of Waucanta.

Every blade was crossed, and there, in the light of the rising sun, each in turn took the oath of vengeance!

And then without a word, with solemn step and downcast head, each warrior returned to his wigwam to mount the war paint and prepare for battle.

When all the young chiefs and old men of the tribe had dispersed, Mantego and Waucanta were left alone.

"I have been waiting to speak to you alone since last night," said the young chief, addressing the medicine man.

"Well?" was the reply, as the old man regarded him attentively.

"I would ask you something that has troubled me greatly since my father's death," said the boy chief.

"What?"

"After my father received his death wound, his voice was silent until just before his spirit was called to his long home."

"Well?"

"The white medicine at the fort restored him to his senses for a brief space," continued Waucanta, "and he would have told me something had not his voice failed him before he could give it utterance."

"Well?"

"My father commanded me before he died these very words."

"What were they?" demanded Mantego, with a gasp of excitement.

"'It is well, my son,' said my father, as he managed to speak with great difficulty—'it is well, my son; Manitou has called, and I must obey his call. I am one hundred years old to-day, and Wakesauka's race is well run. When I am gone you must succeed me. Be brave, be true, and obey me in all that I have commanded you. Mantego, the medicine man of our tribe, will tell you more. I cannot do so—my sight fails me and I can hear the voice of the Great Spirit ringing in my ears—you are not what—you seem—you are a—your name is——.' These were my father's dying words; what did they mean?"

As the boy chief put the last portion of his question sharply to the old medicine, he regarded him with his piercing eyes as if he would read his soul.

But the wily Indian never quailed or flinched beneath the gaze, although the question evidently took him by surprise.

"Why do you not reply?" asked the White Serpent, sharply; "are you afraid to speak? Is there any stain upon my name—have I not the right to bear the plumes I wear as chief of the Pawnee tribe?"

"There is no stain upon your birth—Waucanta's name is as spotless as the white plume that decks his brow."

"Why did my father make the remark, then?" asked the youth, as

if thinking aloud. "It is this that troubles me so much, it is this that has troubled me more than all that has taken place since my brave father died."

"Are you sure those were your father's last words?" demanded the medicine man, regarding the White Serpent, keenly.

"They were! I tell you they were," retorted the chief, stamping his foot decidedly; "they are still ringing in my ears. I shall never forget them while life remains!"

The medicine paused, as if in deep thought.

"If Wakesauka said that," replied he, at length, "his senses must have deserted him—his spirit must have been wandering when he spoke."

"I do not believe it—my father's head was as clear as his tongue, and that could never lie!"

Mantego regarded the speaker with a look of malevolence, but he did not notice it, for his glance was cast momentarily upon the ground.

But the medicine had no time to form a reply before a cry interrupted him, and looking up they both saw an Indian running hastily toward them.

It was Onega, the Black Panther.

As he reached them he addressed Mantego hurriedly.

"You sent me to the cave of the Silver Serpent?" said he.

"Yes."

"Shemawgaa, the Black Otter, was with me."

"Yes."

"Well, he is dead," replied the Indian; "the demon dog of the Catamount has sucked his life's blood, and the Catamount is in the cavern of the Silver Serpent, with his white squaws."

The medicine man stamped his feet and tore his hair, uttering a fierce cry of rage.

"May the curse rest upon him," shouted he; "we must capture him at once!"

Waucanta stood regarding them both, with a look of deep surprise resting upon his face.

CHAPTER XXI.

ON THE MOUNTAIN TOP.

MANTEGO seemed almost mad as he received the news that Seth was in the cavern of the Silver Serpent.

He fairly tore his hair and gnashed his teeth with rage.

"Here!" shouted he, addressing Onega, "go to camp and call the braves to the warpath at once!"

Black Panther started to execute his orders, but before he could do so, Waucanta laid his hand upon his arm and restrained him.

"Hold!" said he, with perfect calmness; "what do you mean? Where are you going?"

The Indian regarded him with a look of surprise, and looked from him to Mantego.

"I go to carry out the orders of the Great Medicine of the Pawnees," said he.

"No," replied Waucanta, "you will do nothing of the kind."

"Why not?" hissed Mantego, savagely.

"Because you are not in command," answered the boy chief; "I am the White Chief of the Pawnees, and I must know the meaning of this before we stir a step."

The medicine gnashed his teeth, but he was too wary to expose himself.

"What do you require?" asked he, as soon as he could control himself sufficiently to put the question.

"I would know what it all means," replied Waucanta; "what and where is this cavern of the Silver Serpent, and what is the meaning of the words that the Catamount and his squaws are there?"

At first the medicine seemed puzzled how to reply, but after a moment's thought he said:

"You remember the ravine where we missed track of the grizzle-headed hunter?"

"Yes."

"Well, close by that spot," said the wily priest, "is the cavern where the Silver Serpent, the guardian of our race, confines himself. Last night, after we returned to camp to perform the last rites of our dead, I dispatched Onega and Shemawgua with offerings to him in behalf of those who are gone on the long journey. They found the Catamount, with his two women, asleep in the cavern, and attempted their capture, but the demon dog overcame and killed Shemawgua, and Onega was forced to fly to save his own life."

"And this is true?" demanded the boy chief.

"It is true as the words of Manitou himself!"

"It is well," said Waucanta. "Go! Call all to arms! We must proceed at once! They shall not escape us this time, by the spirit of my dead father!"

As the young chief shouted the words, he looked sternly at the rising sun and waved his hand determinedly toward the camp.

The messenger awaited no further orders, but departed at once.

The boy chief was about to follow him when Mantego interrupted him.

"Why did you countermand my orders?" asked he.

"Because I am chief of the tribe," replied Waucanta, sharply; "none have the right to command save me when I am present."

"But I am the spiritual in command," said the medicine.

"I acknowledge that right as an advice," said the boy chief, decisively, "but no further. When I require advice I shall apply to you; but I allow none to arrogate my power while I have life or the will to command!"

And without awaiting reply the White Chief strode proudly away.

The medicine man stood regarding him with an evil and malevolent expression until he disappeared, and then shook his fist savagely after him as he stamped his feet with fury, and spat maliciously upon the ground.

Let us return to Seth and his companions. As the old hunter seized up the insensible form of Mrs. Halliday and bore her away tenderly in his arms, as if she had been a sleeping child, Death and Danger released his hold upon the throat of the dead Indian, and sprang swiftly after Clover and his master.

Seth retraced his steps a portion of the way by which he had entered the cavern, and then as the light of the fire at his back began to fade he bade Clover seize hold of his skirts.

"Thar ain't any particular danger that I knows on, little one," said he, reassuringly, "but I think I can get along considerably sharper than I am if I feels yer clingin' onter me, and so can you. We're goin' right up the spiral staircase that I told yer of when I came inter this cave last night, and yer might yet get a tumble."

"All right, uncle," replied the child; "I ain't a bit afeared; but I'll do as you say."

The next instant Seth felt her hands clinging closely to his hunting skirts, and then he commenced ascending the steps in the darkness.

"I hain't the slightest idea what time it is, little one," continued the hunter, as he clambered up the steps, panting from his burden, "for I lost my geerin' while I was sleepin', cuss my carelessness; we might all 'a lost our back hair, and been dead corpses inter the bargain; but I reckon it must be close onter daylight, unless I'm considerably out, but we'll find out as soon as we get on the open space at the top."

For a time he said nothing further, but presently a faint ray of light appeared like a flickering star in advance, and as they proceeded grew brighter and brighter, until finally they all emerged from the darkness into the open light of day upon the broad plateau at the top of the cliff.

It was considerable of an elevation where they stood, and commanded a fine view of the surrounding country for many miles.

Away off in the east the red disc of the sun was just appearing over a forest of towering pines. To the west the sky was brightening up, but the full moon was still perceptible, although her clear light was fading before the rising sun.

"Thar," gasped Seth, as he laid his insensible burden down to gain a moment's breath; "I'm 'mazin' glad we've got so fur without stoppage, for I was awful afeared that we might be followed or find a pack of the skulkin' devils waitin' ter gobble us up. Bless me, what's that?"

The expression was occasioned by something that had caught his keen eyes between himself and the rising sun.

Seth drew his hands quickly over his brows and looked anxiously toward what he had seen.

"Blamed if they ain't buryin' thar dead!" said he, eagerly. "Look, Clover, and ye'll see somethin' that maybe ye'll never have another chance ter see in all yer born days."

The child followed the direction of his index finger, and saw the strange Indian burial service that has been described in a recent chapter.

For some time both stood eagerly watching the burial rites until they were concluded and the sun burst forth with all its splendor upon the weird scene.

They saw the Indians fall prostrate to the earth in silent adoration as the sun appeared, they saw them take the solemn obligation before the medicine of the tribe, and then silently creep away to their wigwams, and as they did so Seth brought his hand vigorously down upon his hip with a blow that sounded like the crack of a rifle.

"Blame my cats," shouted he, "blame my cats! If the red jiggers ain't takin' the oath of vengeance an goin' on the warpath; we must hasten to Laramie at onct and post 'em up or the whole crowd 'll be down on the garrison like a swarm of bees on a honey-suckin' bear."

As he made the remark a sound attracted his attention toward Mrs. Halliday, and turning round he saw she was sitting up and gazing around in deep bewilderment.

"Where am I?" murmured she, drawing her hand wearily across her brow, "how my head aches and buzzes; it seems as if I could not collect my thoughts."

"Never mind, gal," said Seth, kindly, "don't worry or take on a bit, ye're all right, or at least yer will be shortly; come, how do you feel, do yer think yer could walk a bit?"

"I don't know," replied the woman, endeavoring to rise and sinking wearily back again, "I am very weak. Where are we? It seems as if—but I can't remember it at all—it is all a muddled blank here."

Again she drew her hand wearily across her forehead and pressing her temples, sank down into a semi-comatose condition.

"Dog my skin!" said Seth; "this'll never do, for we must be gettin' outen this as fast as our legs'll carry us. Come gal," continued

he, drawing out his pocket flask and applying it to Mrs. Halliday's lips; "take a sip of this and it'll fetch yer round all right. There's nothin' like a drop of the old stuff to set yer on yer feet, or take yer off 'em for that matter; all owin' ter how it's used."

The poor woman took a good stiff pull, and the liquor seemed to have a wonderful effect, for shortly after she had partaken of it she arose without assistance, and taking hold of Seth and her daughter's arms, began her way down the mountain.

CHAPTER XXII.

A MOMENT OF PERIL.

It would have been much better for Seth and his companions had he remained watching the Indian medicine man and Waucanta after the Pawnees disappeared, for if he had done so he would have seen the arrival of the Black Panther with the news of his discovery in the cave; but unfortunately for them this was not the case, and thus they went on, blissfully ignorant of the sad fate that was in store for them.

As they proceeded slowly on Mrs. Halliday's strength gradually returned, for, notwithstanding her demented condition, she was a woman of iron constitution and determined will, as the reader has probably already discovered.

They had proceeded on in the manner described for nearly half an hour, and were near the foot of the mountain when Seth called a halt, and taking some hard bread and dried venison from his hunting pouch, divided a portion between the two women, who sat down to eat it.

The spot where they rested was on the verge of a cliff overhanging a ravine, down which a small stream dropped in a bounding cascade, which had the appearance of a silver thread where it fell into a water course or flume at the bottom.

From appearances the place had formerly been used by a party of prospectors in search of gold.

"There's been some diggin' goin' on 'round here," said Seth, as he chewed away at the fodder, "and I calculate that the chaps that struck it would have panned out pretty well if it hadn't been for the redskins, but they were all killed, and that settles it as far as they was concerned. There's no doubt 'bout thar bein' gold, and plenty of it, too, in this very spot, but it's as much as a fellow's weight of the yaller metal is concerned for a miner ter come suckin' 'round these diggings, unless he is well backed, for it's sure death; the Indians knows what's what, and they don't allow no hangers-on around thar claims, they don't by a long shot. It's nigh onter six years ago that six miners, returnin' on foot from the gold diggings, camped here for the night. It was purty late when they turned in, but when they 'woke, bright an' airly, they discovered at onct that they'd struck it heavy, and it made their hearts jump lively, you bet, when they made the discovery.

"The whole party were dead broke and nearly starvin' for want of food, but they were so pleased when they struck it they went to work at once and panned out a good pile the first day. Wall, they managed ter kill some game and made a snug meal, after which they lay down for the night, determined to work like beavers the next mornin'; but it warn't to be did—the jig was up—for before mornin' the redskins surrounded them and killed 'em ter a man.

"I heard ther story, and ther first time I chanced this way I see ther white bones lyn' in a heap over yonder, where they had been picked clean and white by ther wolves and vultures. I speck I was ther first white man that visited this spot after ther massacre, for the

emigrants gave the diggin's a wide berth after that; anyhow, I gave them decent burial, and that thar heap of stones, topped by a wooden cross, marks ther last restin' place."

"Poor fellows!" said both listeners at once, as their eyes filled with tears at the sad narrative.

"Wall, that's what happened ter them, poor devils," said Seth, "and if every lover of gold got served the same way, maybe there wouldn't be so many scootin' for it as there is—and blame my skin if I don't think it plaguy lucky that we've got outer it with a whole skin as well as we have."

Just as the hunter ceased speaking Death and Danger, who had been seated on his haunches looking wisely up into his master's face, as though he were taking it all in, sprang to his feet, and, sniffing the air gave vent to a low growl.

"Hey!" gasped Seth, leaping to his feet, "what's that, boy?"

The dog ran a little way down the path with his nose to the ground, and then came bounding back uttering a low, ominous whine.

"Ingins, by Jonah!" hissed Seth, grasping his rifle tightly and looking hastily to its priming. "I'm pesky afear'd we're in for it hot and heavy again."

Then taking the same path as that taken by the dog, he ran lightly down the road and threw himself flat on his face.

Presently he rose and came back again.

"It's so sure as fate!" said he, as an anxious look crossed his features; "there's a whole swad of 'em, and ther comin' on on a dead run!"

Clover's face turned deathly pale as she looked anxiously at her mother, but the demented woman seemed utterly unconscious of the approaching danger.

"We must try to hide somewhere," said Seth, "and possibly they may pass us without discovery."

He looked eagerly about, taking in the surroundings at a glance.

The road on which they had been sitting was barely three feet wide, and scarcely admitted of two persons treading abreast. On the side opposite the ravine the cliff ran directly up—almost perpendicularly.

It was studded with dwarf pines and scrub brush, closely interlaced with creeping vines and bitter briars.

It would be utterly impossible to hide therein, but on the other side, directly on the verge of the sloping precipice, stood a huge boulder that Seth thought would prove a haven of refuge.

In an instant he had seized Mrs. Halliday up by the arm-pits, and, placing her behind it, ordered her not to speak for her life.

She seemed, notwithstanding that she was in one of her spells, to comprehend his meaning, for as Clover crouched by her side she pressed her hand and pointed silently to her lips.

Clover nodded in reply and placed her finger on her lips in turn, and as she did so Death and Danger lay down by her side, with his cropped ears elevated to their highest extent.

Meanwhile, Seth had joined them.

The boulder was a large one, nearly breast high, and the backs of the fugitives were directly against the edge of the yawning precipice, from which they were simply protected by a few dwarf pines and stunted brush.

"Keep perfectly quiet," whispered Seth, "and don't dare to speak a word. Look closely to your revolver, little one, and if we're discovered don't miss a shot."

"I never miss, uncle," replied the child, looking bravely up into the old man's eyes.

"I know it," said he, in husky tones, "and, Clover,"—his voice seemed failing him as he spoke—"save a shot for yourself and mother.

It is better that you both die by your own hand than fall alive into the clutches of the bloodthirsty wretches."

"Do not fear for me, uncle," replied she. "I shall do my duty when the time comes."

The trapper was unable to speak as he silently pressed the little hand, and, raising the edge of his sleeve, he wiped the moisture from his eyes.

By this time they could hear the pattering of the approaching savages' feet.

They were coming on a swift run.

Would they pass without discovering their hiding place?

This was the question that was uppermost in the thoughts of all.

On came the approaching Pawnees.

Already the advance guard was appearing in sight.

They were led by Waucanta in person.

He was closely followed by Mantego.

"I'd give my best bullet to give yer a passing shot," muttered Seth; "if I dared to, I would, by Jonah! But it wouldn't do—it wouldn't do."

Clover grasped his arm, fearing that he would do so in his excitement, but a swift glance reassured her as the Indians came swiftly on in Indian file.

Fortunately they were too eager to reach the lead cavern to notice the place where the fugitives had been so recently sitting, otherwise they would have undoubtedly discovered the tracks leading to their hiding place, but, as it was, they swept by until nearly half the searching party had passed.

But then an unfortunate incident occurred. Directly in the center of the passing line appeared the towering form of the Black Panther.

As the savage ranged up abreast of the boulder Death and Danger seemed to scent his presence, and, leaping up with bristling back, he gave a fierce bay.

Seth uttered an oath and kicked the dog to quiet him, but it was too late; the passing Indians had heard the sound and turned front toward the boulder.

Seth saw at once that they were discovered.

He knew the whole line would be down pell-mell upon them in an instant, and, realizing that they must be captured or die game, he determined to sell his life as dearly as possible.

"The jig's up, Clover," said he, hastily. "We must do our level best; remember what I told yer, and give it ter 'em hot and heavy."

As he uttered the words he arose and sent a death shot from old thunder into the center of the savages.

A howl of mortal agony followed the discharge that told of another redskin's life to Seth's account.

As Seth reloaded Clover commenced firing with her revolver.

She had to clamber up to take aim, but as shot after shot rang clearly out on the still morning air the death shrieks of another and another savage told of the unerring aim and steady hand of the brave child.

Meanwhile, Seth's death-dealing rifle rang out again and again with terrific effect.

At first the Indians seemed panic-stricken at the sudden and unexpected attack.

They broke line in the center and fell back pell-mell to the right and left.

But presently Waucanta and Mantego came hastening back, having been warned by the sounds of firing that something unusual had taken place.

As they reached the scene both realized in an instant what had occurred, and the boy chief fell to reorganizing his broken line.

It took but a few moments for the gallant chief to effect this movement, and then the whole party came pouring toward the boulder as the hideous war whoop rang shrilly out with blood-curdling distinctness.

It was a fearful moment; already the bloodthirsty savages were mounting the boulder at every hand.

Both Seth and Clover discharged their revolvers at the same instant, and then Seth clubbed his rifle.

As he did so he stepped back, forgetting the yawning precipice behind him, to deliver a more telling blow.

It was a false move, for his foot caught one of the trailing vines, and, remembering himself, he endeavored to regain his balance, but it was too late, for as he staggered back Death and Danger leaped up, seizing a stout grasp upon his master's waist, and the next instant both dog and man went toppling over the precipice.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WHITE CAPTIVES.

As Seth toppled backward to his fearful doom, Clover had just discharged her revolver and paused to reload.

She heard the old trapper's startled cry as he realized his peril, and, turning, saw him fall over the verge of the precipice with his faithful dog clinging tenaciously to his bosom.

The sight almost froze her heart as she too uttered a terrified shriek, and before she recovered sufficiently to reload the Pawnees came pouring over the face of the boulder and swooped down upon her like a flock of vultures.

In a second Black Panther had grasped Mrs. Halliday by the hair of the head, and, tearing it loose from its fastening, wrapped it around his left hand as he lifted his scalping knife to bury it in the defenseless woman's bosom previous to scalping her.

But before the knife descended with deadly effect Clover sprang to her mother's defense, and hastily drawing her own bowie, which had been a gift from Seth, she made a quick, impulsive cut at the bare bosom of the giant savage.

The keen blade told home just over the heart, and would doubtless have killed the murderous Pawnee in his tracks had not Mantego, just as the blow fell, leaped before the frantic maiden and caught the descending arm with a vise-like grasp.

The brave child, who was large and stoutly developed for her age, struggled desperately to release herself from the tenacious grasp, but the old Indian held her firmly, as, his features wreathed with a grim smile, and elevating his tomahawk, he prepared to deliver a death blow.

"Pale maiden afraid now?" he inquired, leering in her face.

"No!" shouted she; "strike like the dog that you are and end my misery!"

"Good girl!" said he, grimly, "got much pluck; me take to my wigwam and make white squaw by and by."

"No, no, no!" shouted Clover, desperately, realizing from the words the terrible fate in store for her; "kill me first—I'd rather die than become your prisoner!"

"Good! die, then!" shouted he, elevating the hatchet again.

But before the sanguinary blow fell the young chief sprang before him, intercepting the stroke with a quick motion of his hand.

"Hold!" shouted he, "that girl's life must be saved; I claim her as my own; not a hair of her head shall be harmed!"

"But she is my prisoner," replied Mantego, indignantly.

"I care not," came the sharp reply; "I am Waucanta, the White Serpent of the Pawnees, and my word is law!"

The medicine removed his grasp from Clover's hand with an ill-concealed motion of disgust, and turned away to hide his rising rage.

Looking at the chief, Clover recognized in an instant that he was very handsome for an Indian, and as his piercing eyes sought hers with an equally admiring gaze her lids dropped and a warm flush suffused her face and bosom.

Where had she seen eyes like those before?

They seemed to haunt her like a troubled vision, but for her life she was unable to answer the question, and as her eyes fell the young chief seemed to experience the same emotions.

"The pale face maiden need have no fear," said Waucanta, in a reassuring tone. "Nothing shall harm her while in my care. It is not my purpose to wage war on women and children, even if they are the kindred of my worst and deadliest enemy."

"If you mean my uncle," said Clover, sadly, "you need have no further fear of him."

"I mean the gray-haired hunter who killed my father; I mean the Catamount."

"You need fear him no longer," said Clover, "for he's dead—he fell over the precipice just now, and he is dead."

"Good!" hissed the boy chief, with manifest elation, "then my father is avenged."

"You have said you mean me no harm," resumed Clover, after a moment's pause; "if so, prove it by allowing my mother and myself to return to our lonely home. My mother is not herself—she has lost her reason—she is mad."

The young chief bowed his head as he looked with commiseration at the demented mother, and the other Indians followed his example, for it is customary among the Indians to regard a person bereft of reason as under the especial protection of Divine Providence. But the next instant Waucanta shook his head negatively.

"That may not be," replied he, "at least, for the present, for we have matters to attend to that will preclude the possibility of your being set at liberty; but have no fear, yourself and mother shall receive no harm, and every attention shall be paid to you while under my charge."

Then turning toward Mantego, he conversed aside with him for several moments. The old medicine seemed to agree with the plans of the boy chief, for presently they both came toward Clover and her mother, and Waucanta signified that she was to accompany him to camp.

Seeing that there was no use to refuse or to attempt to create a scene, Clover took her mother's hand and silently followed Mantego.

For a time, as they passed down the road, they were accompanied by the main body of the war party, a portion of them having been left behind to collect the dead and wounded and convey them to camp; but as they reached level ground at the foot of the hills the warriors struck due south toward the Platte River, while Mantego, in company with Clover and her mother, took the other route and ascended the hills to the east of the ravine.

Then pursuing the path taken by Death and Danger on the previous evening, Clover finally found herself in the Indian encampment from which herself and mother had so fortunately succeeded in rescuing Seth.

It was a grievous sight to witness the destruction caused by the explosion of the oil; nearly the whole camp had been destroyed, and the few wigwams spared had been removed a considerable distance from

the shaft of flame that still roared fiercely upward from the orifice in the rock.

But Clover was too deeply aggrieved at her mother's condition and the loss of Seth to take much pity on the Indian squaws and children who gathered curiously around her as she was led into camp by the chief medicine.

At first the squaws seemed disposed to plague and torment the captives, on learning who they were, but a stern gesture from Mantego hastily dispersed them, and then he led Clover and her mother to his wigwam in the center of the camp.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MEDICINE MAN'S DAUGHTER.

As the party entered the wigwam, an Indian maiden advanced toward them.

She was scarcely sixteen years of age, and as the light fell through the opening at the top of the tent, Clover noticed that she was very beautiful; in fact, the child thought that she had never beheld anyone so lovely as she appeared.

"Menela," said Mantego, introducing the white captives; "these are two prisoners, captured to-day. They are the special charge of our chief; they are confided to your care; see that you pay them all due attention."

The Indian priest's tones had a metallic ring that boded the white captives little good.

The Indian girl advanced, and looked curiously into Clover's eyes.

"It shall be so," she said, after a moment's pause, "the White Serpent has spoken; it is my duty to obey."

The old medicine man cast an evil glance at the captives, and lifting the side of the tent withdrew, allowing the flaps to fall behind him.

When he was gone, Menela advanced and took Clover's hand, regarding her closely with her dark, flashing eyes, as if she would read her thoughts.

"Are you a friend of Waucanta?" she asked, in quick, decisive tones.

"Who is he?" inquired Clover, innocently.

"The White Serpent of the Pawnees, the chief of our tribe."

"Is he the one who captured me?"

"Yes."

"I do not know him," answered Clover. "I never saw him before to-day. But he said that no harm should come to myself or mother, and, if so, I am his friend."

"And is this all?" asked the Indian maiden.

"Yes."

"If it is so, he will keep his word," came the quick reply, "and I shall be your friend also. Who are you?"

In a few words Clover told Menela all she saw fit of what had occurred, and informed her of the demented state of her wretched mother.

For a brief interval the Indian girl stood regarding Mrs. Halliday, who had sunk listlessly into the corner of the wigwam, with her head bowed upon her bosom, and her hands clasped motionless in her lap.

"Poor woman," said she at length, "Manitou has indeed inflicted her heavily. I believe you, and I shall befriend you; what is your name?"

"Clover Halliday."

"You shall receive no harm while in my charge," said Menela,

passing her hands gently over Clover's golden locks; "but you must be tired and hungry, and I will attend to your wants at once. Remain here, and do not stir until my return."

Lifting the flaps of the tent as she spoke, the Indian maiden disappeared.

Clover crept close to her mother's side, nestling her head upon her bosom and caressing her white hair. The poor woman returned the caresses, but made no reply to the terms of endearment that the child poured into her ears.

Nearly twenty minutes elapsed, and then Menela returned with a squaw bearing food, which was placed before the captives.

Clover ate sparingly, but Mrs. Halliday devoured the food as though she were starving.

When the meal was ended the squaw cleared away the remnants; having disappeared, Menela went to the corner of the tent and returned, bearing a cup in her hand, which she placed to Mrs. Halliday's lips. The demented woman drank it with avidity.

"You need have no fear," said the Indian girl, noticing Clover's anxious look; "I would not harm a hair of your or your mother's head under any circumstances. Have you not been placed under my charge by Waucanta, the White Serpent of the Pawnees?"

Clover saw at once that the Indian maid was deeply infatuated with the boy chief.

"Who are you?" inquired she, passing her hand gently over that of the Indian girl.

"I am Menela," was the reply, "the only daughter of Mantego, the great medicine of the Pawnees; but see, your mother is going to sleep."

Clover turned and saw that her hostess spoke the truth; her mother had fallen back, sleeping as calmly as a child.

Let us return to Old Catamount and his dog.

Seth had realized his perilous position when too late, and vainly endeavored to hold his footing as he struck the creeping vine that precipitated him backward over the verge of the precipice.

With a wild cry he tossed out his hands, endeavoring to grasp something to sustain and break his fall; but the frail bushes parted beneath his weight, and as his brave dog seized him by the waist, both went plunging over the cliff.

Down, down, they fell, toppling over and over in eddying circles, until Seth felt his brain whirling and buzzing like one in delirium.

His eyes seemed bursting from their sockets, and his breath came and went in quick, short gasps, until his senses totally deserted him, and then all was hideous darkness.

How long he lay in this condition he never knew; but when he felt his senses returning he experienced an excruciating pain in his back, that nearly caused him to lapse into insensibility again; but mustering up all his strength he opened his eyes and looked stupidly around.

He found himself lying, back downward, upon a stout pine tree that jutted out from the side of the ravine, with his arms and legs dangling across the trunk, but fortunately his neck had caught in the branches, which probably saved his life, as otherwise the blood would have rushed into his head and caused congestion of the brain.

But gradually, as his shattered senses returned and he realized where he was, he heard a low whine close beside him, and looking in the direction of the sound, saw Death and Danger standing upon a narrow ledge of rock that jutted out at the butt of the tree, and at the same instant he heard the low guttural voices of a number of Indians upon the edge of the cliff above him. Looking upward, he found that he was completely hidden from view by the foliage of the tree, but through the leaves he could plainly see a party of Pawnees

gazing eagerly down into the ravine; and from their remarks he judged they were looking for him.

But Seth was too shrewd to afford them information of his whereabouts by a single movement, and thus he lay perfectly quiet until they had disappeared.

Then he got up, and crawling cautiously to the butt of the tree, crept out on the ledge.

Death sprang toward him with a whine of pleasure, and commenced licking his master's face as if excessively pleased at seeing him able to move once more; but the hunter made him a motion to be quiet, and continued his examination of the ledge.

Presently he uttered a slight expression of pleasure.

He had discovered just what he required; an entrance to a cave.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CAVERN OF GOLD.

It was lucky that Seth discovered the opening just as he did, for as he reached it a huge mound of earth, accompanied by several large stones, came toppling down the cliff, and struck with a heavy thud upon the ledge, causing it to shake and totter as if it were about to fall from the bed of earth that held it.

The hunter dodged into the opening in the bank, accompanied by his dog, as if anticipating that a landslide was about to follow. But after lying quiet for a minute or more, without any further disturbance of nature, he peeped cautiously out and gazed up the bank.

"By Jonah!" hissed he, half aside, as he hastily ducked in his head, "things is gettin' all-fired hot round here. What on earth's going to happen next, I wonder?"

He might well indulge in the query, for as he looked out he had seen two Indians, with lariats fastened under their armpits, being lowered down the sides of the ravine by their comrades.

For an instant Seth feared that he had been discovered while lying senseless in the tree, but if this were the case, he must make the most of it, and sell his life as dearly as possible.

"How pesky unfortunate it is that I lost old thunder in my fall," he thought. "I wish ter the Lord I had the old gal safe and sound again, I do, by Jonah!"

And as if in answer to his prayer, when he looked out again, there was his trusty old rifle, like Abraham's ram of old, stuck fast in the bush at his very hand.

"Wall, I'll be good jiggered if that don't beat the speckled Jews!" said Seth, almost ready to shout with joy. "I was just wishin' my heaviest for you, old gal, and ther yer are safe and sound, sure enough."

And stretching forth his hand, he drew the piece toward him and hugged it closely to his bosom.

In another instant it was loaded and primed, and ready for action, and as it fell to his side Seth noticed something else that made him dance with delight.

It was a large, round stone that stood just inside the mouth of the cave.

To roll it to the opening was the work of an instant, and when this was done it completely shut out the light, leaving Seth and Death in nearly total darkness.

Scarcely had the operation been completed when the sounds of voices were distinguishable on the ledge outside, and then Seth heard

the pattering of the Indians' feet as they moved cautiously to and fro.

"Yes, he was here," said one of the guttural voices. "Here are the marks of his body in the tree. He must have got an awful blow to tear the branches so."

"But he is gone!" said the other.

"So it would seem," came the reply, and then the voices ceased as Seth heard them moving around again.

Several times the old man had to muzzle and throttle his dog with his hands to prevent his giving the alarm, but presently one of the Indians spoke again.

"Here are his tracks."

"Where?"

"Here."

"Yes—but they disappear most strangely. I can trace them no further."

"He must have been so weak when he left the tree that he fell off again."

"That's it! Let us seek him at the bottom of the ravine, and the prey is ours."

Seth rubbed his head thoughtfully.

"Them cusses is lookin' arter my scalp, they is, and they think they'll find me dead at the bottom, and raise it. Well, I wish 'em luck when they do, that's all. They struck me pretty close, though, they did, indeedy, and if it hadn't been for the load of earth they toppled down while descendin', which covered my tracks, they'd struck me dead to-night just whar I am. Wall, a miss is as good as a mile, and for onct I'm pesky glad of it. But I wonder where on earth this hole leads to? I've a plaguy mind ter find out until the coast is clear enough for me to get down the cliff and strike out for Laramie."

And then, as he proceeded to put his plan into execution, his thoughts reverted to Mrs. Halliday and Clover, with considerable trepidation, as he wondered what had become of them after his fall.

Seth felt perfectly confident that the Indians had descended the cliff in search of his body; but before he began his exploration of the cavern he took the best precautions to secure the stone at the opening as carefully as possible.

Then he began crawling slowly along the narrow passage that scarcely permitted of his sitting upright, feeling cautiously forward with his hands as he proceeded.

Death and Danger crouched closely behind his master, keeping closely to his heels.

Gradually as they went on the passage grew higher and wider, and finally the trapper was able to stand erect, when his progress grew easier and more rapid.

In this manner Seth had penetrated, as he supposed, some quarter of a mile into the bowels of the earth, when the sound of rushing water reached his ears, and presently a bright light penetrated the passage just in front of where he stood.

For an instant Seth paused, undecided whether to advance or retreat, but his curiosity got the best of his caution, and he crept on tiptoe toward the opening through which the light penetrated.

As he reached the spot and looked curiously through, a strange and wondrous scene struck his gaze.

Beneath him, from where he stood, he could see a large cavern, in the center of which a large fire was burning.

The red fire light blazed and flickered brightly up, casting its lurid beams fantastically on the walls of the cave, which, to his intense surprise, Seth saw was formed of solid gold.

Seth came near shouting aloud at the strange sight, but the next instant his breath almost ceased as he saw a tall man, dressed in a

fantastic costume, enter the apartment and place a silver call to his lips.

As he did so the same shrill, piercing whistle rang through the cabin as Seth had heard the previous night, when he was being crushed to death in the folds of the Silver Serpent.

Seth craned forth his neck eagerly to witness the result, and as he did so, again the silver call rang shrilly forth with startling effect.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE WIZARD OF THE CAVE OF GOLD.

As Seth heard the sound of the silver call for the second time his eyes were strained to their utmost limits, and to his intense surprise he saw a number of snakes of various species come crawling from nearly every portion of the golden cavern.

As they drew up and ranged themselves around the fire the noisome reptiles commenced hissing and squirming in a startling manner.

Meanwhile, the strange garbed figure went to an opening in the rock and drew forth a number of pieces of meat, which he cut up and divided among them.

The snakes writhed and fought desperately among themselves, devouring the repast ravenously.

The meal being ended, the figure sounded the silver call again.

And as the notes ceased Seth saw the Silver Serpent appear from a crevice in the rock, and come crawling slowly toward the fire.

The man fed him as he had the others and when it had finished eating, the serpent reared up its glittering form and coiled itself around his waist, approaching its swaying head caressingly toward his lips.

The man fondled the monster tenderly, and as he ceased his caresses the serpent released its hold and coiled itself up at his feet. Then the man went to the receptacle in the rock again, and returning with a curious shaped retort, placed it upon the fire. Into this he poured a perfectly pellucid liquid, which presently began to simmer and boil, casting forth a violet-colored smoke.

As the Silver Serpent appeared it took all Seth's skill to keep Death and Danger from alarming the Indian conjurer by his growls, but finally he managed to subdue him and cause him to lie quietly down.

Nearly an hour passed, during which the conjurer kept shaking the retort and agitating its contents, but at the end of that interval he seemed apparently satisfied with his work, and removing the retort he allowed it to cool awhile, when he poured the contents into a flask, where it presented as colorless an appearance as the crystal itself.

The conjurer had scarcely completed operations when a shout was heard in the distance, to which he instantly replied by sounding the silver call.

In an instant the Silver Serpent reared itself from the coil to an erect position, where it remained swaying its graceful head slowly from side to side as its eyes sparkled like black diamonds, and its fangs shot in and out with lightning-like rapidity.

A few moments passed, and then Seth saw Mantego coming leisurely down a declivity in the side of the cavern.

As he reached the floor he approached the fire and made an obeisance to the Indian wizard, which was returned, and at the same moment the Silver Serpent ceased its sinuous movements, and

straightening out to its full extent, crawled toward the medicine man to fondle him, as it had previously done the wizard.

"I have come for the magic elixir," said Mantego in the Pawnee tongue, but Seth was perfectly conversant with the dialect and understood every word.

"It is ready," was the reply, as the sorcerer handed the flask to the Indian priest, "but you must be extremely cautious in its use, as I know not when I shall have another chance to distill another vial."

"How long will the contents hold good?"

"As long as it lasts, unless the Silver Serpent meets its death, in which case the charm ceases and the elixir will be powerless."

Seth craned out his head eagerly at the words, "the Silver Serpent meets his death."

"Great Jonah!" whispered he to himself, "how on airth can that happen? The devil himself couldn't kill him; he's tougher than lignum vitæ or cast steel!"

But the next instant he was all ears again, as Mantego asked another question:

"And the result?"

"The spell over the White Serpent of the Pawnees will be at an end; he will resume his proper color, and be restored to a knowledge of the past."

The Indian medicine man uttered a cry of alarm.

"Is this the fact?"

"Yes, in case of the destruction of the Silver Serpent by human hand."

"But is not he an agent of the Great Spirit?"

"Yes, but his mission upon earth only lasts until his spirit is set free from its shell by human aid, when the clay returns to its kindred soil as does our own."

"But can this be done?"

"Most assuredly."

"How?" asked the wily Indian, curiously.

"By the use of a hatchet formed of the ore of this very cavern."

"Yes?"

"I have one secured in yonder secret repository, ready for use in case the serpent should become wroth and attempt my life."

"I see," replied Mantego, "we must all be prepared; we know not what may overtake us in the journey of life. Good-day; we shall meet again."

And with another obeisance the medicine man withdrew by the same passage that had afforded him entrance.

"That cuss is a wuss snake than ary a snake in the cavern, and twice as pizen," said Seth, *sotto voce*, as Mantego departed, "and he's busy now as the very devil in plotting some infernal piece of mischief against the new chief of the Pawnees. I'd like to know what it is, for I like the young cub, notwithstandin' the way he's treated me!"

But his cogitations were cut short by an exclamation from the Indian wizard, who seemed to be indulging in a soliloquy also.

"It was a bold move," said the strange man, "and worthy of the brain of a great chief like Wakesauka, who had seen nearly a century of moons, and left no kin behind. Ten years ago, nearly to a day, himself and band beset and pillaged an emigrant traveling from St. Louis to Sacramento. After robbing him of every valuable, they killed him, and stealing his eight-year-old son from his dead mother's side, who had been frightened to death by the sudden attack, they retreated to their camp in the Black Hills.

"It was nearing the feast of serpents at the time, and Wakesauka conceived the idea that it would be well to present the white cap-

tive to the tribe as his own son, sent to him from the Great Spirit himself, but how to do it was not such an easy matter of consideration. In this dilemma he called upon Mantego, the medicine man, who in turn came to consult me in my retirement.

"In turn I consulted the spirits of the air, and learned from them that it would be possible to change the boy's complexion to the proper hue, utterly obliterate his memory of the past, and render him the personification of what he was to be represented, an Indian child.

"For this purpose I prepared the proper potions, which were administered with the desired effect, and to-day the White Boy Chief reigns as Waucanto, the White Serpent of the Pawnees!"

Seth's breathing nearly ceased at the startling announcement made by the Indian wizard.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled the latter, rocking himself to and fro over the fire, "it was a bold move and ably carried out, and by this means the son of Reuben Shirley, of St. Louis, who emigrated west under the assumed name of Halliday, is the ruler of the Pawnee tribe!"

"Great Jonah!" roared Seth, unable to restrain himself at the discovery. "The White Boy Chief is my brother's child—he is my own nephew!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

A STARTLING DISCLOSURE.

NEARLY three hours had passed since Mrs. Halliday had fallen asleep, and Clover was seated by her side watching her attentively, when the flaps of the tent were withdrawn and an Indian appeared in the opening.

"You must come with me," said he.

"Why?" asked the child, looking up in alarm.

"It is the orders of our chief."

Clover looked anxiously at Menela.

"Must I go?" she inquired.

"You must," replied the Indian girl, "but have no fear, he will not harm you," she added, noticing Clover's frightened face.

Reassured by Menela's remark, Clover laid her mother's head gently from her lap and accompanied the Indian.

He led her from the wigwam across the camp to another, and ushering her in, retired.

As soon as she had become accustomed to the partial darkness, Clover saw that she was in the presence of her captor, who was seated on a couch of skins.

"I have returned," said he, as he partially arose and motioned her to a seat at his side; "pray be seated."

Clover feared to disobey, and sat down.

"That is well," said Waucanta, with a pleased smile, "for I have returned to speak to you. I have promised that no harm shall befall you, and I shall keep my word. Do you know what I have to say to you, Rose of the pale faces?"

Clover regarded him with a look of surprise.

"I cannot imagine," she replied.

Again the boy chief smiled.

"I thought not," said he; "but Waucanta is a man of few words; his tongue is not forked, and he must speak boldly out."

Clover bowed her head, although she was as greatly puzzled as ever.

"You are very young, White Rosebud," said he, "but you have won my love; I have sent for you to ask you to become my bride!"

Clover withdrew her hand that he sought to retain, and sprang to her feet with her face radiant with blushes.

"How dare you?" she cried, indignantly; "do you call yourself a man and approach me thus? I am a mere child, but I hate you now."

Waucanta seemed deeply pleased at the spirit of the little beauty.

"How old are you?" he asked, with another smile.

"I am nearly thirteen," she replied.

"That matters little," replied the chief, "you will increase in age and beauty, and so shall my love increase as the moons come and go until you become my bride."

"Never," shouted Clover, with her eyes blazing like balls of livid fire. "I will die first!"

Before he could comprehend her purpose, the child had darted toward the opening of the tent and laid her hand upon the curtain.

"Stop!" shouted Waucanta, leaping up and starting toward her.

"No!" replied she, firmly; "stop where you are or I plunge this knife in my bosom and let out my heart's blood!"

Waucanta uttered a cry of alarm and darted toward her, but before he reached her Clover raised her eyes to Heaven with a supplicating look and lifted the blade to inflict a mortal wound.

"Forbear!" shouted Waucanta.

Before the words were out of his lips the blow fell.

But before the keen blade reached her bosom a dark form bounded into the tent and seized the descending arm.

"Menela!" shouted the boy chief, dropping his eyes to the earth with abashed mien.

"Yes!" hissed the Indian girl, while her eyes fairly blazed with passion, "yes, and I am glad I came in time to save the life of this brave child. I have heard all, thou perjured wretch!"

"But hear me, Menela," said he, persuasively.

"No, no, no!"

"You shall," shouted he, with his dark blue eyes flashing almost black. "I am the chief of the tribe, and none may gainsay my word!"

"I do, and defy your power as well!"

"But listen," retorted he, "you must and shall hear me. I did not propose to wed her yet. I would have given her time—one, two, even three years should have been hers, and I would have waited patiently."

"Do you dare say this to my face?" hissed the indignant Indian girl; "you who have sworn to love me, and me alone."

"Yes, but I have my rights as chief," said he; "and I may choose my wives as I will."

"I say no," was the firm reply; "you are mine by betrothal, and mine alone!"

"Ay, but she should have been the second."

"She should not, she could not; it would have been impossible; it would have been a crime."

"Why?"

Menela's eyes fell beneath his piercing gaze; she seemed unable to reply.

"Why?" demanded he again, sternly.

"I cannot reply," replied she, piteously.

"But you must! I require it of you as my affianced bride."

"Oh, do not press me," replied the girl, with deep emotion; "but it would have been impossible—indeed, indeed it would; but do not question me further; pray allow us to retire."

"But I demand an explanation; you must tell me all!"

"It is impossible!"

"Why?"

"Because I am under obligations to my father; ask him, and he will tell you all."

"I will not," answered Waucanta; "I will not; you must tell me all, or it is ended between us, and the White Rose shall become my bride."

"Never," shouted the Indian maiden, frantically, "she is your own sister!"

Clover fell upon her knees at the hideous announcement, with her hands pressed firmly over her bosom.

Waucanta started back as if he had been stricken a death blow, and his olive skin turned almost green.

"Oh!" gasped he. "I feel it all! What is this strange sensation that thrills me to the heart? Am I dying? my father, my mother, my sister, where are you? I am going mad!" and with a piercing cry he fell fainting to the floor.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LAST OF THE SILVER SERPENT.

LET us return to Seth.

As the old hunter heard the announcement of the Indian wizard he uttered a fierce cry, and gave vent to his feelings aloud.

The wizard was startled from his reverie by the cry, and looking up saw Seth looking down at him with his features working convulsively.

He seemed deeply surprised at the sight and turned to fly, but noticing the movement Seth gave a call to his dog, who, in a second, made a flying leap to the floor of the cavern, and springing at the throat of the Indian, buried his fangs deeply in the quivering flesh.

The next instant Seth was clambering down the side of the rock.

On reaching the cavern floor he sprang to the assistance of his dog, at whom the Indian was cutting fiercely away with a large knife.

"Stop that, ye infernal sneaking cayote," roared Seth, as he tore the knife from the uplifted hand and hurled the wizard free from the grip of the dog, "that old bull pup of mine is worth a dozen of your miserable carkis, 'deed he is. Let him alone. Death! lie down, sir; whar's yer manners when I'm speakin', hey?"

The latter to the dog as he again sprang at the Indian's throat.

The wretch leaped violently back, cowering with terror, as Seth took a casual glance around the cavern, in which he saw that every reptile had disappeared except the Silver Serpent, which lay coiled up near the fire ready for action, with its sparkling eyes set fixedly on the dog.

But as before, Death seemed in mortal terror of approaching within the bound of the loathsome monster, taking care to keep at a safe distance.

"That's right, Death," said Seth, grimly, "keep yer weather eye onter him, or he'll play yer foul, until I get ready to settle his hash, as I reckon I shall presently."

Then, turning to the Indian wizard, he addressed him again:

"Look here now, ye are my prisoner, d'ye mind, and none of yer juggling tricks, or I'll rip yer guts out with yer own weapon. Now answer me all-fired quick, d'ye hear?"

"Yes," moaned the affrighted wretch, sinking abjectly upon his knees; "what can I do for you? I am yours."

"Was that all gospil truth yer was telling that Injin mountebank about the white boy chief jist now, hey?"

"Yes, every word."

"And he really is the son of Reube Shirley?"

"Yes."

"How came he ter change his name?"

"He got into trouble in St. Louis," replied the wizard, "and was forced to keep quiet, so he changed his name until he could dispose of his property and come West."

Seth nodded his head.

"I see," said he. "I hearn tell somethin' of that, but I heard again that he was dead. Well, and so he married under the name of Halliday, hey?"

"Exactly."

"That settles it; and the part about the golden hatchet was true too?"

"Yes."

Seth nodded again.

"That'll do for yew," said he; "now give me the key ter that cubby hole."

"I haven't got it," replied the wizard.

"Ye liel!" roared Seth, "I see yer openin' it not more'n an hour ago!" and, leaping upon the Indian, he bore him to the earth, and commenced searching him for the key, but he could not find it, for the man had spoken the truth.

"Yer a cute one," said Seth. "I suppose ye've been playin' some of yer hokus pokus on me, and sleight-er-handed the key away; but I reckon I'll find it, or find some other way of openin' ther crib, but first I'll have ter fasten yer down or ye'll begin playin' some new dodge ont'er me."

And as he hissed the words Seth drew a stout cord from his hunting-pouch, and wrapping it tightly around the Indian's limbs secured him where he lay.

But before he had completed the operation the wizard had sounded the silver call again.

As the call rang shrilly through the cavern, Seth heard a hissing sound behind him, accompanied by a rustling noise, and the next instant he felt the hot breath of the Silver Serpent upon his neck.

With a quick spring the hunter tore himself aside from the reptile's coils and darted to the hiding place in the rock.

He found on reaching it that the wizard had spoken the truth, for the key was in the lock.

Seth tore it open, and the first thing that met his hand was the golden hatchet.

He had discovered it none too soon, for the next instant the Silver Serpent was upon him again, hissing and writhing in the intensity of its fury.

Seth endeavored to leap aside, but it was too late, for in a second the monster had whirled its folds around him and commenced drawing them closer and closer together, as the voice of the Indian wizard was heard encouraging him to the attack.

Meanwhile, notwithstanding his fear, the dog had sprang to the assistance of his master and was snapping and biting at the horny scales, vainly endeavoring to gain a hold.

"It ain't no manner of use, old chap," said Seth. "I've tried his metal already, and he's harder'n flint, but here goes for another shy."

With a quick stroke Seth aimed a blow at the serpent's head.

The blow fell with a deep thud, and the golden blade of the hatchet cleft the reptile's brain.

A low, plaintive moan followed, like the expiring breath of one in

distress, and then the folds loosened from the hunter's frame, and the serpent lay writhing in its death agonies at his feet.

Seth uttered a gasp of relief as he stretched forth his arms and expanded his crushed chest.

"That does for you, I reckon," said he.

"Yes."

Was it a human voice that spoke?

Seth never knew, for a misty veil seemed to cover his eyes, and when it dispersed he saw that the Silver Serpent was no longer at his feet. But Death and Danger lay there instead, crouching and quivering as if he had been stricken with the ague.

Turning in the direction of the affrighted gaze of the dog, Seth saw the Indian wizard lying in mortal agony with the dead serpent coiled around his form, and its fangs deeply imbedded in his throat.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MANTEGO'S LAST HOPE.

SETH pressed his hand dreamily across his brow, as if failing to comprehend the strange events that had taken place.

His brain still seemed dazed by the mystic cloud that had obscured it for a brief interval.

"Can it all be true?" he muttered to himself, "or is it all a hideous vision?"

But there lay the dead wizard with the motionless serpent coiled closely around his stiffening corpse. He could not doubt the evidence of his senses.

"But it will never do to remain idly here," he said, the next moment; "I must be getting, or some of his companions may return and snap me up. Come, Death!"

And slinging his rifle over his shoulder, he consigned the golden hatchet to his hunting pouch, and grasping up one of the blazing pine knots from the fire as a torch, he commenced clambering up the rock toward the secret passage by which he had found entrance to the cavern.

With the light in hand it was much easier to retrace his steps, and it took him but a short time to reach the place where he had been hiding while the Indians were looking for him.

"I wonder if any of the bloody cusses are hanging around yet?" he muttered, as he went to the boulder that he had rolled to the mouth of the cave and drew it cautiously aside.

Looking out, he saw that the coast was clear, and stepped out on the narrow ledge.

He was followed closely by his dog.

Reaching the tree in which he had lodged on falling, Seth discovered that the Indians had left one of the lariats dangling from the cliff above, while the other was fastened to the roots of the tree and hung down to the vale beneath.

"I don't believe it would be quite safe to go down," said Seth to himself; "the infernal skunks may be loiterin' round below, so I reckon I'll go up and trust ter luck."

Pulling up the lower lariat, he fastened it securely around the breast of Death and Danger, and securing it around his own waist he commenced clambering up the other, hand over hand.

As the hunter ascended, the dog, finding himself abandoned, commenced tearing up and down the ledge, howling in the most frantic manner.

"Cuss the whelp!" growled Seth; "he'll give me away and call

the red devils back, if I don't hurry," and renewing his efforts he speedily reached the top of the cliff.

Here he found visible marks of the desperate struggle that had taken place during the conflict. Numerous pools of blood were scattered here and there, but not an Indian was to be seen.

"They have carried off their dead and wounded," said Seth, "but what has become of the old gal and Clover?"

His heart turned deadly sick at the thought, but there was no time to lose, so returning to the precipice he commenced hauling stoutly upon the thong that held Death and Danger.

In a few moments the dog was safe beside Seth, and manifested his delight, as the lariat was removed, by numerous canine terms of endearment.

But Seth never paused to return the caresses, as he started swiftly away down the path.

It was now broad daylight; the sun was nearing the meridian.

"It will never do to go to the Indian camp alone," thought Seth, "especially at this time of day, but I must find what has come of Clover and the gal. Let's see," said he, as he sat down on the edge of a log; "what's the best thing to do under the circumstances? I reckon I better wait till night."

Just then he heard a rustling sound in the bushes a little way from where he sat.

"Ingins, sure as fate!" gasped the hunter.

In an instant he was on his feet and looking eagerly around.

"It is my only chance," he whispered, as he noticed the log.

It was the butt of a fallen tree, and decayed at the heart.

As quick as thought Seth pointed to the hollow, and Death darted into it immediately.

Seth followed quickly, and, drawing a portion of bark and fallen leaves in upon him, was completely hidden from view.

The movement was none too soon, for scarcely had he concealed himself before a party of half a dozen Pawnees appeared in view coming up the path, and, as they reached the spot, sat down upon the very tree in which Seth was hiding.

Let us return to Clover.

As the Pawnee chief fell prostrate upon the floor of his wigwam he appeared writhing in the most excruciating agony.

His whole frame seemed racked with internal convulsions.

He writhed and twisted, drawing his limbs together with spasmodic energy.

White froth foamed from his lips, and his eyes rolled violently in his head until nothing but the whites were to be seen.

He doubled himself up like a ball, and then straightening out again, commenced crawling around the floor, imitating the movements of a serpent in its dying agony.

With a wild cry of alarm Melena darted toward him and knelt frantically by his side.

She wrung her hands violently and shrieked aloud as she endeavored to lift his head to her bosom.

But Waucanta beat her off with his hands as he writhed away, uttering a hissing sound.

Clover was kneeling in the corner, utterly unable to move, with her eyes glaring with terror.

"Oh, speak to me, speak to me!" shrieked the Indian maiden, in tones of agony, as she again endeavored to seize the writhing chief.

But before she could do so the flaps of the tent were drawn hastily aside, and Mantego appeared in the opening.

He took in the whole at a glance, and his eyes flashed with anger as his face turned as black as night.

With a cry of savage rage, he tore his daughter from Waucanta's side, and forced her from the tent, causing Clover to accompany her, and then kneeling by the prostrate chief, he grasped him firmly in his arms.

But the movement seemed to inspire the sufferer with redoubled energy, for he struggled and fought more desperately than before.

"He must have the potion now," whispered the medicine man to himself, "although it is twelve hours too soon. I have never witnessed him so terribly agitated before."

And kneeling upon the breast of the prostrate chief, he withdrew the crystal flask obtained from the wizard of the golden cavern from his bosom.

Then pushing back Waucanta's head, he approached it to his lips.

But with a desperate effort the chief tore himself free from the restraining hand, and leaped to his feet.

Then there came a hissing, sputtering sound from the vial, a white cloud seemed foaming within the glass, and with a sharp report it shattered into a thousand fragments in the hands of Mantego.

With a cry of baffled rage the medicine man leaped to his feet in turn and groaned aloud, and at the same instant Waucanta sprang hastily through the opening of the tent.

It was the very moment of the Silver Serpent's death.

The last hope of Mantego had perished forever.

CHAPTER XXX.

SETH'S PERIL.

"He is saved! My father will restore him to reason!" whispered Menela, with her face fairly radiant as she quitted the chief's tent in company with Clover. "Thanks to the Great Spirit, he is safe at last."

As she uttered the words Menela felt a touch on her arm, and looking around, beheld Clover at her side, looking up inquiringly into her face.

"What do you mean by saying that your chief was my brother?" whispered Clover.

The Indian girl took her hand and pressed it tenderly.

"I meant just what I said," she replied. "I will tell you all, for there must be no secrets between us in future. I have learned much more of my father's secrets than he thinks I know, and I will confide in you and tell you all. My father is the great medicine of our tribe, but there is a greater medicine than him. Before he reached his present rank he had an elder brother who held his position; but desiring to practice his arts more privately, he gave up his place to my father and secluded himself in a cavern in yonder hills. There he still remains, while my father practices here in his stead. Nearly three years ago, one night while my father considered me asleep, his elder brother paid him a midnight visit, and during the interview I heard the story of your father's death, and what subsequently occurred. After your father was killed, your mother fell insensible to the earth, covering you with her shawl, and thus it happened that you were not discovered, while your brother was taken to our camp in the hills by Wakesauka, the chief of our tribe, who brought him up as his own son. Through the aid of the Great Spirit your brother's skin was rendered the hue of a native Indian, and his hair turned a deep black, when he was presented to the tribe as the direct heir of Wakesauka, whose rank he inherited at the old chief's death. Thus you will see that while yourself and mother have remained with the old trapper, your brother has been with us until he has become the reigning chief of the Pawnee nation."

"Oh, mother, poor, dear mother! She always has insisted that my brother was not dead. How happy she will be when she hears of

this!" murmured Clover, clasping her hands at the joyful intelligence.

"That cannot be," said Menela, stamping her foot decisively. "She must never know this, Clover; I have told you this in confidence, and it must remain a secret between us. Your brother does not even suspect it himself. Even my father does not know that I am aware of it, and it would cost me my life if it were to become known. May I not trust in you?"

Clover uttered a sad sigh.

"I suppose it must be so," she said, at length; "am I not a prisoner and altogether at your mercy?"

"You shall lose nothing by keeping my confidence," replied Menela, pressing Clover's hand warmly; "trust me that I am your friend, and if I can restore you to your friends I shall most gladly do so."

"But come, let us return to your mother."

And retaining hold of Clover's hand, she led her to her father's wigwam.

Let us again return to Seth, whom we left secreted in the hollow of the tree upon which the Indian scouts were sitting.

There were six of them, as has been already stated, and they had chosen the spot to eat their lunch. They were chatting cheerfully together and munching the parched corn and dried venison, when suddenly the rotten log cracked ominously, and before they could rise, gave way beneath their weight, precipitating the whole party without warning directly upon the back of Seth and his dog.

Death and Danger uttered a fierce growl, and shaking himself loose, fastened his fangs securely in the leg of the nearest savage.

The redskin uttered a howl of pain, and vainly strove to tear himself from the tenacious grip, while Seth, upon whom the other five had fallen in a heap, disengaged himself as hastily as possible and leaped up, completely covered with the debris of the rotten timber.

"Cuss yer infernal meddlin' hides," roared he, as he darted a telling blow at the face of one of the savages which sent him to grass with the blood pouring in torrents from his nose as he was endeavoring to rise; "cuss you, I'll make mince meat out of the whole caboodle of you!"

But the other four were on their feet by this time, and came pouring on him in a body with uplifted tomahawks and gleaming knives.

Unfortunately for Seth, his rifle was hidden in the decayed trunk of the tree; thus he had no time to get it or draw his revolvers before they were upon him, but, drawing his knife, he resolved to sell his life as dearly as possible.

With a swift stroke he made a lunge at the nearest savage, but the blow was met by a descending tomahawk which nearly hurled the knife from his hand, and at the same instant Seth felt a cold chill running down the back of his neck, where another hatchet had wounded him near the shoulder blade.

Seth fully realized his dangerous position as he wheeled round and round, cutting savagely to the right and left with his knife, dealing numerous wounds to his assailants, but things were getting terribly hot, and he knew it, as he endeavored to make his way to the nearest tree as a means of protection.

Meanwhile Death had been doing excellent service. After throttling the Indian upon whom he had leaped and strangling the life out of him, he turned and tackled the other savages in turn, snapping at their heels and biting their calves, causing them no little discomfort.

But notwithstanding his aid, Seth was getting decidedly the worst of the fight, when suddenly the sharp report of a number of carbines was heard, and a body of United States cavalry burst through the bushes and rode down upon the Indians, cutting right and left with

their sabers, and in less than two minutes the fight was ended, and every Indian a prisoner.

It took but a few moments for Seth to explain matters, when the officer in charge placed a spare horse at Seth's disposal, and the whole party were riding rapidly away toward the Indian encampment.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN Waucanta darted from his wigwam he was nearly crazed from the effects of Menela's announcement, besides which the spell cast upon him by the Indian wizard having ceased to work, a reaction had taken place that left him almost as weak as a child.

As he reached the open air he pressed his hands wearily over his throbbing temples, and sank to the earth in a state of partial insensibility.

In this condition Mantego found him when he emerged from the wigwam, and, making a few passes over the prostrate youth, he rendered him thoroughly insensible.

Then taking him in his arms, he removed him to his couch and left him in a calm slumber.

Mantego was fully aware, from what had taken place, that the Silver Serpent had ceased to be; that the spell was broken, and that when Waucanta awakened he would have a perfect recollection of the past.

He felt that something must be done quickly to obviate the threatened danger, for if Waucanta awakened and created a scene, his power as medicine man of the tribe was ended forever. He would have killed the sleeper where he lay had he dared to do so, but this would have been dangerous under the circumstances; accordingly he determined to call a council of the sachems of the tribe to propose the sacrifice of the white captives as a propitiation to the Great Spirit for the loss of their late chief.

The council was called at once, and after a deliberation of nearly an hour two stakes were prepared, and Clover and her mother were led forward to suffer death by fire.

The two women were securely bound, and the wood piled up around them, notwithstanding their outcries and urgent appeals for mercy.

But their merciless persecutors paid no heed to their supplications as they completed their bloodthirsty preparations.

Already the executioner had stepped forward to apply the torch, when suddenly a volley of musketry was heard at the verge of the camp, and the next instant the Indian pickets were driven in as the United States troops appeared, and a sharp skirmish ensued.

But it was of extremely short duration, for it took barely ten minutes to overpower and capture every Indian in the camp.

Quite a number of the tribe were on the warpath, and the few braves and old men left made but a feeble resistance to the attacking party, who carried everything by storm.

Mrs. Halliday and Clover were released from the stake, and although they had suffered terribly during the trying ordeal, they were overjoyed at meeting Seth, whom they had mourned as dead. Even Death and Danger came in for his share of caresses, and from his capers he seemed the happiest personage of the party.

But a few words will serve to complete our story.

The whole party returned to Fort Laramie in company with the troops, where Mantego was tried and punished for his crimes.

It took months before Waucanta was completely restored to reason, but a cure was finally effected, and his sister and mother are residing with him at present in St. Louis.

He is rapidly recovering his proper hue, and although his hair is still a deep black, no one who sees him would ever suspect that he had formerly presented the perfect personification of a red man of the plains.

Mrs. Halliday, although still an invalid and weak in intellect, is a very happy mother, and if the latest reports be true, Seth and his nephew will go West in the spring to make preparations for working the lead mine, while a company is organizing in St. Louis for a similar purpose in connection with the cave of gold.

Both Seth and our hero are the reigning lions in St. Louis, where it is currently reported that Menela, the Indian belle, will shortly become the bride of THE WHITE BOY CHIEF.

[THE END.]

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